

THE RANGER BOYS TO THE RESCUE



Claude A. LaBelle

*See also
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"He had a double fight, first to get to the path of the canoe on time, and second to breast the current."
(*The Ranger Boys to the Rescue*)

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THE RANGER BOYS TO THE RESCUE

BY CLAUDE A. LABELLE

AUTHOR OF

*"The Ranger Boys Find the Hermit," "The Ranger
Boys and the Border Smugglers," "The Ranger
Boys Outwit the Timber Thieves," "The
Ranger Boys and Their Reward."*



A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers

New York

THE RANGER BOYS SERIES

A Series of Stories for Boys 12 to 16 Years of Age

By **CLAUDE A. LABELLE**

The Ranger Boys to the Rescue

The Ranger Boys Find the Hermit

The Ranger Boys and the Border Smugglers

The Ranger Boys Outwit the Timber Thieves

The Ranger Boys and Their Reward

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THE RANGER BOYS TO THE RESCUE

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THE RANGER BOYS TO THE RESCUE

CHAPTER I.

CHUMS.

It was one of the hottest days that the people of the little town of Colfax could remember, yet the assembly hall of the Colfax High School was crowded to the doors. Proud parents were assembled to see their sons and daughters receive the diploma that meant four years of hard work.

On the platform, surrounded by girls in crisp white dresses and boys in white flannels and blue coats, Kenneth Harvard, the class valedictorian, was declaiming on "The Need of the World." In the assembly hall itself, divided according to classes, were the rest of the students of Colfax High.

Sitting together were three boys to whom our attention must be directed, as they are the ones with whose adventures this book is concerned. The tall-

est of the trio was Garfield, or as he was generally known among his many friends, Garry Boone. He was a fair-headed chap, whose well knit frame showed the results of his activities on diamond and gridiron. Next to him was a sandy-haired boy whose weight was rather over the average and whose smiling face showed him to be a chap of perpetual good nature. Dick Wallace's athletic exploits were confined mainly to water, and like most fat boys he was an excellent swimmer. The third member of the trio, which by the rest of the school was generally referred to as the "Three Musketees," was a quiet, lithe, dark-complexioned boy named Phillippe Durant, the star of Colfax High's baseball team. It was his pitching that has led the team to victory in the high school league of Cumberland County.

Durant was of French descent, and spoke the French language with the same ease that he did English, in fact he was the leader of the three boys as far as scholastic ability went.

The accepted leader of the chums was, however, Garry Boone. The three had grown up together, and since they had been old enough to run around, Garry had led while the others followed. It was an accepted fact that wherever one was, the other two would be near at hand.

Now for the first time in their lives they were

facing disappointment and separation, for in the coming fall, Garry and Dick were to leave for a military academy for a year's schooling prior to entering college. Garry's father was a wealthy timber and mill owner and well able to send his son to the best school in the country.

Dick was generally known as an orphan, and had been adopted by Mr. Boone. His mother was dead, and his father, who had been a professor of botany at an Eastern University, had disappeared after a fall from a horse, which had caused an injury that took his memory from him. His father and Boone had been college mates together, hence Boone's action in adopting the youngster left without a home or parents by the sad accident. Of course, he was going away to school with Garry, for Mr. Boone was determined that the boy should have the same chance as his own son.

With Phil Durant, however, it was different. His parents were in very moderate circumstances, and the fashionable military academy was out of the question for him. Mr. Boone, recognizing the fact that the three had always been inseparable, had offered to "stake" him through the academy, but the boy's pride, his heritage from a long line of old French landholders, made him refuse.

This then, was the cause of their disappointment. It seemed as if here was the parting of the ways,

for at the end of a year of separation, there was no telling where their different paths would lead them.

The orator on the platform had given way to a young lady who was reading an original poem, and but one more event remained on the program, the distribution of the diplomas.

Garry leaned over to the other two and remarked:

"Now that Ken Harvard has told us in half an hour what the world needs, and Eleanor Barnes has read her cherished poem, what do you fellows say to a dip in the Merinoc?"

For about the fortieth time that day stout Dick Wallace wiped his perspiring face.

"That's the first sensible thing I've heard today," he said. "Let's make a break for it just as soon as they start crowding around to congratulate the graduates."

The "crowding around" process started, and the three chums slipped out of the hall and started at a brisk pace towards the river that ran at the edge of the town. The Merinoc was a small lazy river with a strip of beach that made an ideal swimming place. Mr. Boone, who encouraged all manner of athletics on the part of the town boys, had erected a small, but suitable bathhouse, and had engaged a college boy every summer to teach swimming and take care of the youngsters who had not learned the aquatic art sufficiently to be left alone at the river.

The chums made short work of their walk to the river, despite frequent requests from the puffing Dick to slow down a bit. Dick's weight had always been the cause of much good natured fun on the part of his slimmer companions. Dick had never been able to make much of a mark in athletics, on account of this weight, except in the fall, where his extra poundage stood him in good stead as center of the football team. He was very proud of the fact that he had won his high school letter as a member of the team, although his chums frequently remarked that a stone boulder could do just as well in his place.

Presently the boys emerged from the bathhouse ready for their plunge into the cool waters of the river. At a time like this, however, Dick Wallace was in his glory. He could swim like a porpoise, and seemed to be more at home in the water than he was on the land. Neither Garry nor Phil were poor swimmers, but they were by no means the equals of Dick. He could give either of the chums a start and beat them to the float in the middle of the stream. And he was just as adept in a canoe as he was when swimming.

"Look at that fat boy swim, will you, Garry," called Phil, as Dick started with a long underhand stroke for the float. "He's a regular human fish."

At that time, little did any of the chums dream

of the adventures that Dick's aquatic ability would lead them into before the summer was over.

Tired of swimming about, the boys got out the canoe, and still in their bathing suits, paddled about a mile upstream to where they had one summer built a small shack on a strip of land near the river belonging to Garry's father. This was their favorite retreat, and many a long Saturday they had spent there, cooking their own meals, and mastering, on a small scale of course, all manner of woodcraft.

Phil was naturally adept in this, and used to boats that he could be set adrift in the deepest forest, and find his way out. More than that, he declared that he could live comfortably a week without any kind of provisions.

It had been about two weeks since the boys had been to the shack due to examinations and the fact that the baseball team had been away on two trips, but as they always kept a supply of provisions in the shack, they decided to have their supper there.

"Did you know that Robert's cottage was broken into last night?" inquired Dick as they paddled slowly. "That makes the fourth burglary in the past week. Wonder if there is an organized band working here?"

"Don't think they are real burglars," replied Garry. "They only take the summer cottages that are unoccupied. Careful of that snag there! We

had better think up some way of dragging that thing up some time this summer, it spoils the canoeing unless you keep your eyes open all the time. There are two other bad ones a mile beyond our shack, too, and they ought to come up."

"Returning to the burglaries," said Phil, "if they aren't burglars, who are they?"

"Why, I think that they are just hoboes," answered Garry. "There have been more than usual this past month. It is getting warm, and they are heading north. You notice that they take only the empty cottages, and don't touch the stores or the post office or the railway station where they would be sure to find money. Food and blankets seem to be their only plunder."

"Well, you forget that the post office and depot at Gordon were broken into two weeks ago, and that is less than twelve miles from here," retorted Phil. "I think it is the same crowd. We ought to turn detective and capture the bunch," he said banteringly.

"Fine lot of detectives we'd make," laughed Garry. "Well, here's the landing. Dick, we pulled your elephantine body all the way up here, so it's up to you to pull the canoe ashore while we open up the shack. Also, you might bring in an armful of wood for the fireplace."

"That's right, let Dick do it is your motto when

there is real work to be done, but all right, you fellows will have to wash dishes," grumbled Dick as the others raced to the shack.

"Look here, Phil, the door is unlocked, no, the lock has been broken," cried Garry. "Bet you anything our friends have rifled our shack. That means we don't eat here tonight."

Impetuously the two boys rushed into the shack, and were astonished to see three uncouth looking tramps preparing supper at the big fireplace. Before they could make a move, the three tramps seized the boys, bundling them in a corner, where one big hobo menaced them with a club and warned them to make no noise.

"We'd better tie these guys and then make a break for the wood, Frisco," muttered one of the tramps.

"No we don't," retorted the one alluded to as Frisco, "we has 'em safe and we'll tie them and then we feeds. This shack looks better to me now than junglin' up in the woods and eating out of a can. We takes our time and we eats and then we leaves for that little job tonight."

"Right, matey, you're the boss here. Don't you boys let out a peep, or we'll make you sorry," warned the tramp who was guarding the boys. "We'll just tie you up to make sure," which two

of them proceeded to do while the other reconnoitered outside the shack.

In the meantime, Dick had hauled the canoe up on the shore, and gone some little distance back of the shack to get the wood for the fireplace. Hence the tramp who looked around outside was not aware that there was a third boy in the party. He came back, and after telling his mates that there was no one about, and that they could use the canoe to get away with, went back to preparing supper.

Dick had gathered his wood, and in passing around the cabin glanced in at the little window and met a sight that nearly made him drop the wood. Garry and Phil were tied up and bundled in one corner, while the three tramps were sampling the contents of a black bottle as they waited for the supper to cook.

Dick grasped the situation instantly, and his first thought was to rush in and confront the tramps. However, the fact that he was one against three husky hoboes, and that he could count on no help from his pals, made him stop and consider. He saw that while they were ugly looking customers, there seemed to be no danger to his chums.

That they intended staying there for some little time seemed apparent, as they had not started to eat yet.

That decided Dick. He carefully laid down the

wood and speeded to the canoe. Once at the river's edge he shoved off and began to paddle downstream for dear life. His one thought was that here were very likely the burglars that had terrorized the two towns during the past few weeks, and once he could reach town, it would be only a matter of minutes before he could have a crowd of men on the way back to the shack.

The fat youth bent to his paddle, and was sending the frail craft dancing down the stream, when all of a sudden there was a crash, a ripping sound, and then Dick found himself struggling in the water, choking from the mouthful of the Merinoc that his sudden and unexpected plunge had made him swallow.

Dick's canoe had struck the snag that they had spoken of on the way up, and which he in his haste to get to town, had forgotten about.

He calculated hastily that he was still about three quarters of a mile from the bathing beach, but that was a small distance to him, and lunging into his favorite underhand stroke, he started down the river. Later, when the excitement was ended, and he thought of his swim, he declared that he broke all records for the world in that distance swim.

Then the beach loomed in front of him, and with an exhausted gasp, he waded ashore and fell on the sands to get his breath back.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESCUE.

DICK lay on the sands for a few moments until he felt his breath returning. Then he arose and started on a run toward the village a half a mile away. Whatever his ability in the water, he was not built for running, but he knew that time was precious and he must get to the village where he could enlist the aid of the constable and some of the men of the town to return to the shack and rescue his companions from the clutches of the trio of tramps.

Luck was with him, however, for he met the constable after he had run but a little more than a quarter of a mile.

"Tramps, Mr. Smith, at our shack—on the river—"

He was unable to say more, as his breath failed him.

The constable was not like those painted in most story books. He was a rather young chap and big and husky.

"Well, what of it, Dick. Don't seem to have hurt you any unless they held you up and stole your breath from you."

"No, they didn't see me, but they have Garry and Phil Durant tied up in our shack and I think they are the ones who have been breaking into the post-office and the cottages around here." Dick's breath had returned, and he was able in a few words to give a coherent account of the affair at the shack. Constable Smith was a man of action; rushing to the nearest house he telephoned to the garage where he knew there would be several men hanging around, at least the night man of the garage would be there and it was likely that some friend or two would be with him.

He gave orders for the men to take a machine and come to the house he was 'phoning from.

"Bring a shotgun if you can pick one up on the way, but don't waste time looking for one if it isn't handy," were his final instructions.

Dick mentally calculated the time that had elapsed since his hurried departure from the shack, and the amount of time necessary before they could get back to capture the tramps. He had some fear for the safety of his companions, but felt that they would not come to serious harm, as the most the tramps would do would be to depart and leave them tied up until some one could come along and release

them. His main thought however, was the capture of the tramps. Dick did not know why, but he felt sure that they were the ones who had been committing depredations in the cottages, if not the graver crimes of robbing the postoffice and station.

His thoughts were interrupted by the constable.

"Boys ought to be here in a minute or two now, Dick, so don't worry. Do you know that if they are the tramps who are believed to have broken into the Gordon postoffice, there is a tidy sum of money hung up in rewards. The town has offered one, as well as the county, and the railroad had added a considerable amount to it since the station was also entered. Totals twenty-five hundred all told, and if we capture them and they are the right parties you boys will come in for a good share of the money."

Before he had finished speaking a car stopped by them and a voice hailed: "That you, Constable. This is Pete from the garage and I picked up two of the boys on the way out here. Couldn't find a shotgun, so we'll have to use the weapons nature gave us. Hop in and where are we going?"

Constable Smith and Dick clambered aboard and Dick told them where the shack was. The garage worker knew where it was and started at a breakneck pace up the river road. Half way there, Dick spoke up:

"You can go almost to the shack by this road, but

they'll hear the machine and may skip out before we can reach them. If you turn out on Pringle Road, you can come within three hundred yards of the back and steal down on them through the scrub oaks that surround the shack."

"Good head on you, Dick. That's what we'll do. Here's the turnout and you tell us where to stop so that we'll get there as quick as possible."

In record time they arrived at a point where Dick knew there was a path to the shack.

Within a few feet of the cabin, Smith halted the men and whispered:

"Guess the best way is to rush the door and surprise them. Sorry we haven't got a couple of shot-guns, but cal'late this old service revolver will have to constitute the whole of our artillery. You fellows might pick up a couple of clubs, they may help some. When I give the word, rush 'em off their feet."

Two of the men searched a minute till they found a length of wood sufficiently stout to make a formidable cudgel, while the auto man had brought a heavy monkey wrench with him.

The door was half ajar, and as the men crept up, they could hear the voice of one of the tramps. From the conversation, they were evidently just in time.

"I've asked yer for the last time what time the

station agent goes home for the night, or does he go home. If yere don't answer, I'm gonna kick a little answering into yer tight face."

"Now!" shouted Constable Smith and the men poured through the door. The melee was over in less time than it takes to tell. The three tramps, completely surprised, were quickly overpowered by the brawny constable and his aides, while Dick rushed to cut the ropes that bound his chums.

Soon the hoboes were tied up securely and made to walk to the machine. The boys had to walk home because of the smashed canoe, and since they all disliked notoriety, quietly went to their homes, not deeming it wise to inform their parents or guardian just then of the eventful happenings of the night.

Saturday morning dawned clear and warm. School was over until September, but there still remained the game of baseball with Merritt Academy, the last game on the schedule. Although Colfax High had won the championship, they wanted to win over Merritt Academy, which was the long standing rival of Colfax in all branches of athletics.

At the breakfast table in the Boone household, Mr. Boone was glancing over the Portland Express. Suddenly he laid the paper down and regarded the two boys with a smile.

"Rather a modest pair of chaps, aren't you?" he asked.

"Why, no, sir," replied his son. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, the Portland Express has always been to my mind a most reliable newspaper, and I find in this morning's issue a hectic account, probably sent them last night by our bright young editor Mr. Northley, of the capture of a dangerous band of yeggs through the instrumentality of one Dick Wallace, aided and abetted by two youths who rejoice in the names of Boone and Durant.

"It wasn't anything, sir," said Garry, "Dick here is entitled to all the credit. We only aided by letting ourselves get caught like a couple of six year olds. If we had had the sense of a horse when we found the lock on the cabin door broken, we wouldn't have rushed into the hands of the tramps the way we did."

Mr. Boone took up the paper again, and remarked:

"I note that there is a rather sizable reward for the capture of a band that has terrorized the neighborhood for some time. Fortunately, the station agent at Gordon will be able to identify the men that tied him up and robbed the depot. He is to come here this morning and take a look at the men. It was thoughtful of you boys not to disturb Mrs.

Boone when you came home last night. I imagine that it would have bothered her more than it will this morning, when she sees that neither of you are the worse for your adventure. By the way, isn't today the day of your last game for the season? I suppose without asking, that Colfax will nail Merritt's hide to the barn door. Last year Merritt did that for you, so you have two objects in view, completion of a successful season, and the wiping out of last year's defeat."

"We're quite sure of winning, Dad. Phil was never in better form, and fortunately, he wasn't hurt last night."

"Phil is surely a fine pitcher," rejoined his father. "It is a pity that he won't accept my offer and go to the military academy with you. He is not only a fine athlete, but a brilliant student as well. I must talk with him again."

"I am afraid, sir, that it will do no good," concluded Garry, as the boys rose from the table. "Phil is as proud as Lucifer, and then his father's health is bad and he feels that he should be at home to help with the store."

The two boys started for Phil's house to get him and then go to the ball grounds, for the game was to be played in the morning. After picking up Phil they walked slowly up the street to the grounds, discussing their recent adventure.

They had hoped that no one would remark on the affair of the night before, but the correspondent for the Express had told his story too well, and when they got to the grounds they found that everyone had either read the story or been told of it, and they were greeted by an uproarious ragging from their team-mates. Cries of "Ah, there, Heroes" and "Where's you star, Constable" rose on every side.

"I'll hero the whole bunch of you in about a minute," threatened Dick, but he was only able to make them shout the harder.

"That's enough," cautioned the captain. "Get into your uniforms, and we'll proceed to the election of next year's captain, and while I am talking, I just want to say that I am happy to have had the honor of captaining for the first time in my four years at High a championship team. My only wish is that I could be here next year to help you repeat."

The boys dressed speedily and then gathered together for the election.

The captain stood up on one of the benches in the locker room, and lifting his hand for silence said:

"I would like to nominate for next year's captain a man who has been active in practically every branch of sport in the school. He is also one of the oldest men on the team and he's a natural born

leader and a fine fellow as well. That's all, only to nominate Garry Boone."

The shout of approval brought a flush of pleasure to Garry's face as he mounted the bench.

"Fellows," he said, "I want to thank you for this honor, and I can assure you that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to lead you next year except for the fact that neither Dick nor I will be at Colfax next fall. My father has decided that we need a little taste of military school discipline. Therefore, I decline the honor and ask for the privilege of naming our star pitcher, Phil Durant, for my place. I understand that Phil will be here next year, and I am sure that you couldn't ask for a better man for the job."

Immediately bedlam broke loose among the players.

"Say, look here, Garry, what do you mean, not coming back. Here we get a regular team, and figured that we were only going to lose two men, and now we find our prospective captain and star second sacker deserting us," said Guy Wheaton, backstop of the team.

"And not only that," chimed in Ted Harris, who was also a football player, and would-be humorist of the school, "we haven't enough money in the school treasury to hire an elephant to take Dick's place at center on the eleven."

"Wait a minute," interrupted the retiring captain, "you fellows have missed the whole point. Do you realize that the sacred trinity has bust up, all shot to pieces, blown to atoms, all— what's the use? Can any of you fellows imagine Garry, our thin little friend Dick, and Phil Durant separated? I never thought I'd live to see the day. Say, look here, Garry, if the thought of the team doesn't make you change your mind, consider the three musketeers reduced to one."

"I know," replied Garry. "I hate in many ways to leave, yet I am going up for West Point in another year and need the military school work, and besides, you fellows know that when my Dad says anything, it generally goes as it lays. Let's get to the election, and snap out onto the field for practice."

Seeing that all pleas could not change the boys, the election was held and Phil was chosen without opposition. Called on for a speech, Phil, who had never expected the honor, was for once in his life at loss for words.

"All I can say is thank you, and let's go out and whale the tar out of Merritt. Half the school is over here to see them win. Let's disappoint them good and proper."

Out on the field Merritt Academy's nine was warming up, and the stands were rapidly filling with friends and supporters of both nines, for Merritt

Academy was situated in only the next town. Banks of banners of blue and grey showed where the Academy sympathizers were seated, while the gold and blue of the home team upholders flashed brilliantly in the sunshine.

The Merritt men retired from the field to let the home team have its practice, and soon the field was filled with the boys rushing here and there warming up until the umpire shouted, "Play Ball," and the game was on.

CHAPTER III.

PHIL'S VICTORY.

"HEADS up, fellows," called out Phil, the new captain, as he took his place on the mound. Every man on the team braced up, for they knew that in the Merritt Academy team they had a hard nine to beat. Merritt and Colfax had been hereditary rivals for some years, and unfortunately, in baseball, Merritt had triumphed more often than in any other sport.

As a matter of fact, if the boys had been given a choice of the league championship or a victory over Merritt, it is safe to say that the majority of them would have chosen the Merritt victory. The Merritt players were as a rule a trifle older than the boys of Colfax High, and as it was a richly endowed school they were able to obtain the best in coaching talent. This did not deter the Colfax boys, however, from putting their best foot forward.

Phil was in rare form as he started the first inning. He was more than pleased that he had been

elected to the captaincy, and he felt that he must give an expression of thanks to his teammates by pitching them to victory. His determination was rewarded by seeing the first two players go down by the strikeout route, and the third man retired the side by popping up a little fly to Garry Boone on the keystone bag.

Harry Payne was pitcher for the opposition, and was quite as good a pitcher as Phil. He demonstrated this by holding the Colfax boys to one little scratch hit made by Ken Harvard, the first man up for Colfax. The next three men went out in apple pie order.

A lean sunburned man sat in the front row of the small grandstand, watching the plays intently. He turned to his companion and remarked:

"One inning is pretty early in the game to begin to judge a team, but this sure looks as though it was going to be a pitcher's battle."

"Looks that way," returned his companion, "but I can tell you right now that the high school boy is a shade the better pitcher. He has the sweetest change of pace I ever saw in a boy player. However, let's wait until the ninth inning before we make any rash decisions."

Of course the boys on the field did not know it, but the two men were what are known in big league circles as "scouts," those men retained by teams to

travel about watching amateur players, and carefully listing them for the future as possible timber to make big league ball players of.

The second inning was almost a repetition of the first. Phil was pitching grand ball, allowing practically no hits, and when an opposing player did connect with the horsehide, the men in back of Phil were on their toes and prevented runs. The stands were a Bedlam of noise. Banners were waved frantically and both team's adherents kept up a ceaseless racket, imploring their favorite players to start something.

Payne slipped for a minute when Garry came to bat, and the second baseman rapped out a smart two bagger, but he was destined to die on third as he made an attempted steal.

In the fourth inning Phil went bad for a few minutes. He slipped a fast one over to the first man to face him, and Merritt roared in triumph as the ball went out towards center field. Taylor, the center fielder, was unable to catch the fly, but his quick recovery and throw held the Merritt player on second. Tad Flynn gripped his bat and came to the plate.

"Come on you high schooler. Give us a real ball and I'll show how Babe Ruth does it," he shouted at Phil. Phil knew something of the natural nervousness of a man at bat, and attempted to

worry Flynn by wasting several plays in what he knew was a vain attempt to catch the man at second base napping. After four or five throws, he decided to let Flynn have a swift one. He wheeled from watching second base, and just as he was about to throw, took a quick glance at second, where he could see the runner edging off for a dash to third. His arm halted but a fraction of a second, then he threw. Immediately the umpire motioned the batsman to take his base, briefly saying, "Balk."

Merritt sympathizers broke into a wild cheer, and a heavy silence fell on the Colfax portion of the stand. Garry and several others ran in to protest to the umpire, but his word was law, and he refused to alter his decision.

"Never mind, old top," sympathized Garry as he went back to his post, "strike this next fellow out. We're all behind you."

Phil was perturbed. He knew that he had made a balk, and it bothered him since the coach had warned them scores of times against this very foolish play. He lost his grip for a moment, and then to the dismay of the school passed the third man, filling the bases and nobody down.

The sunburned man's companion turned and remarked:

"Just a wildflower with a little luck the first two

innings I guess. He has himself in a sweet pickle now."

The sunburned scout grunted.

"Wait a few minutes. The best of them fall by the road once in a while. He's up against it now, and what he does when he's in a hole is the best test that you can give to a pitcher."

Durant was angry with himself for his poor pitching and his blunder, and looked on the verge of blowing up. Garry saw the signs and ran in a bit, cautioning Phil in a low voice to get together and pitch ball. "Tough luck, but they haven't scored yet. And remember, there are five more innings."

Phil knew that he was in a bad hole. Even one good hit might prove a disaster for the whole team. Was the new captain to start his career with a bad failure? He gritted his teeth and endeavored to settle down. Then suddenly his grip seemed to come back. His first ball pitched resulted in a foul that went over the back of the stand. One strike. Then he pitched two more balls, both swift and hard. His fourth attempt resulted in another foul. The catcher made a desperate attempt to recover it but failed. His fifth ball we would have sworn cut the corner of the plate, waist high, a perfect throw. The batsman however, let it pass, and to his dismay, the umpire, instead of motioning the batter from the plate as Phil firmly expected, caused untold dis-

may when he called, "Ball!" He was in the grip of the dreaded three and two, the bases filled, and a feeling that even the umpire was against him. Up to this moment he had pitched balls at lightning speed, he wound up for what the batter was sure would be another swift one. Phil, however, sent the ball at what seemed to be an almost motionless flight. It was what the scout had called a "sweet change of pace." The batter saw the ball coming up to him almost like a balloon, and bent to meet it with a killing swing. Just as he struck, the ball broke perfectly, and the batsman was out.

The stands broke into a wild shout, and the cheerleader called for "Colfax the long way, for Durant." Phil felt that the strain had broken, and when the next man was up, tried another slow one. The batter met it, but instead of the long fly that was expected, popped it into the air only a short way. The runner, sure that it would be an easy catch for Phil, made the grave mistake of slowing up in his stride, keeping his eyes on the ball. The runner at third hugged the base, taking no chances.

The thought of a desperate chance flashed through Phil's mind. He knew that he was not pitching very good ball, and if he caught the little pop fly, it would be only two men down with the bases still full, and Wiggins, the most dreaded batter of the Merritt team to face him next. There was one

chance and he took it. As the ball touched his hands, he dropped it, giving it enough of a flick with his glove to send it rolling along the grass. Immediately there was a cry from the base line coaches to their men. "Run!"

Every man sped from his bag, and then Phil, as he had planned, recovered the ball. He saw that the first base runner was nearer the bag than was the man on the way home, and although in baseball, the logical play is always to try for the man nearest home, he took a long chance, relying on Thompson the first baseman, to divine his play. One foot on the bag, Thompson made a perfect catch, and not even turning in his tracks, snapped the ball to the catcher. There was a cloud of dust, and Phil, his heart in his mouth, waited for the umpire's verdict. Then he breathed a great sigh of relief, and started for the bench. The umpire had thrown his hand over his shoulder, and Durant's ruse had resulted in a perfect double play, retiring the side, and lifting him out of the worst hole that he had been in during a season's playing.

The sunburned scout leaned back and thumped his seatmate on the shoulder. "That," he proclaimed, "is a piece of baseball strategy worthy of Walter Johnson. That youngster is worth watching closely and I mean to have a little conversation with him after the game is over."

His companion seemed to doubt his opinion.

"It was a long chance for a kid to take, and there was only one chance in a thousand that he could make it. Seems to me he should have made his safe play and taken a chance at the next batter."

"Nonsense," sharply rejoined the older scout. "It was a chance of course, yet it was a carefully and swiftly planned play. The boy knew that he was blowing up, and another hit would have started a running fest that would have resulted in sure scores. It was a piece of playing that brands that boy as a brainy player. Well, let's see what they can do from now on."

When Phil reached the bench he was swamped with his shouting teammates. Many of them thought it was a matter of pure luck that he retrieved his error, but the coach, who had been a famous pitcher on the Colby College team knew that it was a ruse, as the ball was a dead easy catch.

"Good headwork, Phil," he said as the boy took his seat. "Guess that puts an end to what seemed to be a real batting rally."

Colfax was able to score no runs in their turn at bat, and again Phil took the mound, this time, however, with renewed confidence, and the advantage of a brief rest in which to collect himself. He settled down and pitched airtight ball for the rest of the game. If Durant pitched good ball, so did the

Merritt Academy man, and the score was nothing to nothing when the home team took their raps for the last half of the ninth. It looked like an extra inning game, for the tail end of the batting list was up, with Phil the third man at bat. The first two batsmen were easy victims for Payne, and then Phil came to bat. Like most pitchers, he was a poor man with the willow, and this must have made Payne ease up a trifle.

While the last two innings had been going on, coppery colored clouds had been gathering in the air, and portended a real Maine electrical storm. As Phil took his place at the plate, a few big drops hit him, and with a groan he gripped his bat. If a downpour came, it would probably mean that the game would be called, and the score remain a tie. There would be no chance to play off the tie since it was the last game of the season, and an off schedule game at that. Payne sent over a swift ball that cut the pan dead in the middle, and then it happened. Probably the most surprised man on the grounds was Phil himself when he saw the ball sailing high in the air.

He started for first like a flash, rounded the bag and was on his way to second when he saw that the ball was bound for a ride over the fence. Colfax High's outfield was not deep, and the center-fielder would have needed an airplane to get that

ball. Phil slowed down and trotted to the home plate. He had done what all pitchers dream about and pray for, won his own game, and a seemingly impossible game at that.

Then the heavens crashed and the storm broke in all its fury.

In the locker room the boys pounded Phil on the back and cheered him till they were hoarse.

"Some new captain we've got, fellows," said one of the outfielders. "Let's give him three with a tiger," and the cheers were given with a will.

As the boys took their showers and dressed, the talk was all of the great game and the fact that Colfax had wiped out the disgrace of last year's overwhelming defeat by Merritt Academy.

Perhaps the most exuberant of them all was Dick. While he did not play on the team, he was entrusted with the official score keeping.

The boys had just finished dressing when the manager of the team came back.

"Seems to be a visiting day for Phil Durant. Two strangers want to see him, and Payne of the Academy is waiting to offer his congratulations. He is next year's captain over there. And by the way, the Sheriff of Cumberland county wants to see you and Garry and Dick. What have you fellows been up to?"

CHAPTER IV.

VACATION PLANS.

"GUESS we'd better have the sheriff in first, Phil, hadn't we?" asked Garry. "He seems to be the the most important one of the lot."

"All the same to me," said Phil with a laugh. "Wonder what he wants?"

Sheriff Knowles was a large black-bearded man, who, when he saw the boys, gave them a hearty grip of the hand.

"So you're the boys who were responsible for the capture of the bunch of yeggs that have been playing havoc in our county. Well, I'm glad to meet you, and if you can spare me a few minutes I'll turn a little loose change over to you. It may come in handy now that summer's here," and the sheriff pulled out a fat wallet and began to shell out bills like so many leaves of grass before a lawn mower.

Light dawned on the boys then. It must be the reward money for the tramps, or yeggs. As the sheriff was counting out the money, Garry interrupted him.

"I think, sheriff," he began, "that the reward money should go to Constable Smith and the men who helped him. We really didn't make any capture, you know."

"I guess, sonny, you had better let me be the judge of that. The reward money from the town of Gordon and the county totals up to twenty-five hundred dollars. The station agent from Gordon identified the yeggs this morning, and we have had word from Rockingham, N. H., that there is a reward of a thousand dollars for this same crowd. I have talked with Constable Smith, and he agreed that I better decide about splitting the reward, so I decided that it should be split in lots to share and share alike. That gives you all five hundred apiece, and saves any argument. Here's the money now."

Since everyone seemed to be satisfied, the boys accepted the money. Like every one, they felt pleased with the idea that they had aided in the capture of notorious bandits, and the thought of the reward was especially gratifying. Phil was the most delighted of all, for a sum of money that size meant far more to him than it did to Boone and Wallace, who were in better circumstances than he.

"I've got a busy day ahead of me," remarked the sheriff, "so I guess I'll be trotting along. Next time I want any help in the county, I suppose I'll

have to 'phone you boys. You did what neither my deputies nor myself was able to do."

While the sheriff had been talking to the boys, the other visitors had come into the locker room. Payne was the first to speak after the sheriff's departure.

"First," he said as he shook hands with Phil, "I want to congratulate you on your pitching today, also on your election to the captaincy, which your manager has just told me of. Then I want to congratulate you as the luckiest chap in six counties. Grabbing a big reward for capturing those tramps, and then the lucky way that you got out of that bonehead error you made when you dropped that little fly."

"Excuse me," and the sunburned man broke into the conversation, "I am surprised Mr. Payne, that you have just made an error yourself. That was no booting that he made. It was a remarkably fine piece of strategy. If you had been watching as carefully as I was, you would have seen that Durant here deliberately dropped the ball on the chance of making just the double play that he did. By the way, Mr. Durant, let me introduce myself. My name is Atkinson, and I am a scout for the Boston Red Sox. My friend here is Arthur Simmons. He is looking about for some material for this summer for the Trolley League, which you know com-

prises the cities of Brunswick, Lewiston and Augusta. He would like to talk to you about joining up with him for the summer. The pay is good, much better than a boy your age could earn at any other kind of summer work. I advise you to consider his proposition seriously, as I would like to keep an eye on you myself. Of course, you are too young to be thought of as big league timber, you need a good bit of seasoning and rounding out before that would be possible, but the training you would get in a couple of summers with the Trolley League would put you in good place for a tryout with the big league."

While the others crowded about and listened, the man named Simmons outlined his proposition to Phil. When he had concluded, Phil told him that he would have to consider the matter and that he would also want to talk it over with his father and mother before making any decision.

"That's right," agreed the big league man. "Never fail to talk things over with the folks. They are considerably older than you and their ideas are generally the best to follow. However, if you like, I myself will talk with your father."

Phil agreed to meet the two gentlemen at the Exchange House that evening, and let them know what decision he had come to. When the two left, Phil sat silent for a moment. The pay was really

attractive, and would go a long way toward helping the family.

Professor Gault, who coached the high school baseball team, really settled the matter, however, for Phil.

"I can see," remarked the professor, "that you are seriously considering accepting this offer, Durant, and I for one wish that you would refuse it. You have still a year to play on the Colfax team, and we have talked pretty often about your going to college after you leave here. Do you realize that if you take this man Simmons' offer, it effectually bars you forever after from playing ball, or for that matter any branch of athletics either in high school here, or in college, for you would have ceased to be an amateur once you accepted pay for playing ball? In other words, you would have become a professional, and I think that you are rather young to plan on professional sport for a living. I advise you to give the matter serious thought."

The boys, in company with the opposing team's pitcher left the little club house together. Payne started the conversation.

"Fortune seems to be dropping plums into your lap with a vengeance this morning, Durant. However, I think the same way about playing summer ball that your coach does. You better drop the idea."

"That seems to be the only sensible thing to do," answered Phil. "However, I'll talk it over with my father and let him advise me also."

"It strikes me that the best thing everyone has been doing this morning is advising you," said young Payne with a laugh. "Let's change the general style of conversation. What are you fellows going to do with yourselves for the summer?"

Garry answered first. "Dick and I will probably stick around here a bit, then take a little trip to Boston, and spend the rest of the summer at Dad's cottage at York Beach. If we can persuade Phil here to forget about playing ball we'll get him to go along with us to the beach, at least for a while. It will be some time before we can chum around together, for Dick and I are going away to school next fall."

"Where are you going?" inquired Payne.

"Bradford Military School," answered Garry.

"Well, if that isn't a coincidence. I'm bound for that same place next fall. Wonder if we can't arrange to room together; I understand that they have large studies for three men who want to room together."

As Payne was a very likable chap, Garry and Dick readily agreed to arrange to room with him. As the talk of rooming and school came up, Phil felt a wave of discouragement sweep over him, and

as a result he did not join in the conversation.

"You haven't told us what you were going to do for the summer yet, Payne," said Dick.

"Oh, I've got the finest summer vacation doped out that you fellows ever heard of. There's a party of us going to camp for the summer in the Catskills. My older brother has a peach of a lodge there that he and a friend built one summer when my brother had to go to the mountains for his health. There'll be my roommate at Merritt, and two fellows from my home town who are going to Bradford in the fall. They're both dandy chaps and you'll like them immensely. We plan on having a great time in the mountains. There's all manner of fishing, quite a chance for hunting small game, and a lake where there is plenty of swimming and boating. I camped there for two weeks last summer and I never knew before how short fourteen days could be. This time we're going to stay all summer. It's a great life, I can tell you. Well, here's where I leave you. I'm going to have dinner with my aunt, you know her, Mrs. Dean, and go back to school this afternoon. You know we don't close until next Wednesday. You chaps are lucky having closed already."

Payne left them, and the three boys started talking of what fun such a camping trip would promise. Suddenly Garry stopped in the middle of the side-

walk and let out a regular warwhoop. Both his chums looked at him in amazement. Dick called to Phil:

"You tackle him by the feet and I'll sit on him, and then you run for the doctor. I hope it isn't catching." A royal roughhouse ensued, and then Garry, laughing, bade them let him loose.

"Gather 'round me, brothers, while I impart to you the swellest scheme ever thought out. First place, Phil, you drop that crazy idea of going away to play ball. Then you prepare a convincing argument for yourself regarding the remainder of the summer. I know your first objection is that you feel you will have to help your father with the store this summer. The answer to that is that you have just come into a young fortune, and you can let your Dad have part of it with which he can hire a fellow for the summer. There are any number of chaps in the school who would jump at the chance.

"Now this is the big idea. You know Father owns a lot of forest land up the state, and we three are going to camp out there this summer. No hunting lodge in the Catskills, just the trees and a blanket, and a campfire to cook over. Dad can tell us where there is a good place near a stream so that we can have fishing, a swim, and if necessary we can get a canoe either near there somewhere or have ours shipped there. Now, Phil, you hustle off

to break the news to your folks, and Dick and I will go and interview our respected parent and guardian and tell him all about it."

Phil's discouraged blue mood fell away, and he darted for home, calling over his shoulder:

"Meet you fellows at the swimming beach in about an hour and a half, and we'll see if it can't be done."

When Phil reached home, he found his father and mother already at lunch. They knew all about the victory, for Mrs. Durant had attended the game.

Their son breathlessly started off with an account of the morning's happenings, beginning with the reward money, and winding up with the proposed camping trip. Mrs. Durant said the matter rested largely with Mr. Durant, but that she felt that since the boys might be separated another year, they had better have their good times this summer.

Mr. Durant pondered a minute, and then said:

"In the first place, I appreciate the fact that the baseball playing appeals to you somewhat, because of the help the pay might be to us. But I think that you are too young just yet to consider playing professional ball. As for the camping trip, I am quite in favor of it. My health is much better this year, and things are picking up at the store. It has been quite a struggle to make it a paying proposition, but the future is quite bright. Then you have

been a great help to me this past year, and I believe you deserve a vacation. You should have a splendid time, and I am sure that everything will go along fine, for I have a great regard for Garry Boone's ability. He is a level headed boy, and I am confident that he will lead you into no trouble."

Little did either Mr. or Mrs. Durant know of what adventures would befall the boys before they returned to their home.

Phil wasted no time in finishing his luncheon, and after doing a few customary chores about the house and yard, he set off to the bathing beach to tell the good news to his companions.

As he hastened toward the river shore, he thought of the good times that a summer in the woods promised. Phil was a good shot with a rifle, and he expected to find plenty of opportunity to display his skill as a marksman.

When he reached the bathhouse, a surprise awaited him. Garry and Dick were there, and with them was Mr. Boone. The boys hailed Phil with a shout.

"Dad's got a surprise up his sleeve and he won't tell us till we have had a dip and paddled up to the cottage. We've borrowed a canoe, as ours can't be fixed, and Dad is going to replace it with another as soon as one can be sent from Portland."

CHAPTER V.

THE FOREST RANGERS.

MR. BOONE was a great chum of the boys, and often went swimming or canoeing with them. This afternoon, after they had had their dip, they dressed and then started up the river for the shack. Mr. Boone was a man of about forty, and still possessed the gift of youth. He had started life as a surveyor and timber scaler, and had risen in the world until he was a prosperous timber and paper mill owner.

After they reached the shack, they repaired the broken lock, and straightened out their belongings that had been strewn about by the tramps. The boys were on tenterhooks to know what his great plan was, and Mr. Boone teased them for a while by refusing to divulge it. Finally, however, he yielded to the constant pressure that they exerted on him, and seating himself comfortably on an old camp chair, while the boys stretched themselves on the ground near him, he began:

"I am very much interested in your plan to spend your vacation in the woods, but you say that you want to stay there for the entire summer and however enjoyable the woods may seem to you, you would likely get tired of it after a month or so.

"You know that I am a great believer in putting some responsibility on boys of your age, and furthermore, what I am about to suggest will put you in the way of earning your own way on your vacation, without robbing you of any of the pleasure of camping.

"Perhaps you have heard of the Forest Rangers. They are the men on whom depends the safety of the investment of the timber owners. The one great danger in the woods is fire. If there is a dry spell, there are countless ways that a forest may take fire. A good bit of the danger comes from the sparks from the engines along the tracks. This happens only near settlements, or where the tracks run near the beginning of the timber growth. But there are countless square miles where trains never run, and the danger in these spots is from careless hunters, campers and trappers. Then, too, there are many squatters, people who have settled on the land, far away from civilization, and who stay there until they are driven off by the land owners, or the beginning of timber cutting. Then they merely pack up and go further into the woods, and build a new

shack. In the past there has been a great deal of warfare between the land owners and the squatters, and there are many cases on record of the squatters having deliberately started fires in the forests as a means of revenge for having been driven off land, which, although they have no legal right to, they claim as their own, because of long occupancy.

"In dry weather, a small blaze will in a few hours get such a start, that thousands of acres of fine pine timber will be swept away as though a giant scythe had slashed across the woods. This is enough to ruin a timber owner, since it is years before the timber will again grow.

"Now we must especially protect our forests. Timber is getting more and more scarce in Maine, and in a few years the demands of the paper mills, which use the timber for pulp to make their paper with, will be greater than the supply.

"Fortunately, the state and the Federal government have taken steps to preserve our forests. Conservation they call it. Nowadays, instead of sending a logging crew into the woods to cut down everything in sight, the trees, or as the men often call them poles, are carefully picked, and the young trees are spared so that there is a constant growth to be cut from. The great danger of fire still exists, however, and to guard against this danger, there has sprung up in the state what is known as the

Forest Ranger service. This service is composed of men who keep lookouts from the hilltops and men who patrol the woods on certain specified routes.

"Their duty is to spot a fire whenever possible, and then through their means of communication, send word to the crews who are in constant readiness to rush to the scene and battle with the flames. I won't go into the methods that they use now, as you will probably have a chance to see it for yourself if you fall in with my plan.

"In order that you may better understand how I am able to bring about what I propose, I must explain to you that the cost of maintaining the Ranger Service is equally divided between the state and the timber owners. This gives the timber owners a chance to recommend men for appointment on the service. The Chief Ranger and the deputies are, of course, men who have spent the greater part of their lives in the woods, and are competent to direct the fire fighters when the need for their services arises.

"The Rangers themselves, the lookouts and patrolmen, are either men who make that their business, spending the winter months in logging, or college students who find that a good way to earn their expenses, as they go into the woods and stay there three to four months, and come out to find their accumulated pay awaiting them. There is no

chance to spend it in the woods, and it is as good as a bank. Most of the timber owners supply the men with the food needed for the summer, either at a slight cost or free from their co-operative stores.

"Now, while I realize that you boys are not old enough for me to recommend as regular Rangers, I am willing to hire you myself on one of my properties. I will pay you two dollars and a half a day, which is not the regular salary, but will give you boys enough to get an outfit, and have a good bit left over for pocket money for school next year.

"I believe that I have enough influence with the Chief Ranger to get you an appointment as a special extraordinary unit of the Ranger Service. I thought that you boys would like to cover the Sourdehonq district, which is fairly easy to cover, and would be ideal for you to break in on. The plot that I own is only about ten square miles, which makes an easy patrolling distance.

"It is forty-five miles from the nearest town, and there have been no lumber operations there for seven years, as the landholders in that section have agreed not to start cutting until the growth has become more satisfactory. That means that you will find a fair bit of small game, although you must scrupulously obey the game laws of the state, in fact, the Rangers have authority to notify the Game

Wardens of the state in case they find the laws being broken.

"There is a lookout station on the top of Sourdehonq Mountain, which is really not a mountain, but an overgrown hill, and about half way down is a comfortable cabin that has been used by the lookout and the patrolmen of that district. There is a fine mountain stream where you may get plenty of trout, and about seven miles from the foot of the hill is the Anabasa River, a sizeable stream that is often used in the spring freshet for logging drives. It is rather popular for camping also, so you may meet with parties occasionally and not get too lonesome. Now you boys tell me what you think of the plan?"

The boys did not need to give it any further thought. They had been doing nothing but thinking and anticipating since Mr. Boone had started to talk. So in answer to his question, there was a unanimous shout of approval.

Garry and his chums began to ply Mr. Boone with questions.

"How soon may we start?" was Garry's first query.

"Just as soon as you can get outfitted," replied Mr. Boone. "I thought that perhaps we might go to Portland Monday and get your stuff, and Wednesday you might start for Augusta to take the

oath of office, and receive what advice and instruction Chief Ranger Phelps might have to give you. Thursday you should arrive at Millinocket, and then you must trek into the woods yourself, carrying your supplies. You can get your food supplies at Millinocket, at the co-operative store of the Federal Pulp Company, in which I have an interest. You can go by buckboard for about twenty miles, then there is no road, and you will have to carry the supplies yourselves, pack fashion. It is probable that you will have to cache part of them, and make two trips, for the supplies necessary for three husky boys will make a good load. Dick here is the one that will be hardest hit. He will find it hard enough to carry himself through twenty-five miles of forest without carrying a heavy pack on his shoulders.

Dick groaned. "Believe me," he remarked in a heartfelt fashion, "I won't carry any supplies, then I will have to go on a diet and reduce so that people will stop poking fun at me."

"From what I saw of you at breakfast and lunch, young man, dieting is the last thing in the world that you would do," laughed Mr. Boone.

"Do we wear a uniform," inquired Phil.

"No," there is as yet no set uniform for the Maine Rangers, although I believe that the Rangers of the Yellowstone Park and reservation wear a uniform, but they are a unit absolutely under the con-

trol of the Federal government, and enlist, and are under orders in much the same way as the army. However, custom has made most of the Rangers wear practically the same kind of clothes, since experience has taught them that they are the most comfortable. A Stetson army hat, flannel shirt, heavy khaki coat and trousers is generally worn. For footwear, the men use woolen stockings and what are known as "shoepacks." These are high moccasins, but instead of just the soft leather sole, they have a fairly heavy leather sole nailed or stitched to the sole of the moccasin. This makes them wear better, and saves the soles of your feet from being hurt by constant contact with sticks, twigs and stones, which would press through the soft leather of an ordinary moccasin."

"Are we armed?" was Dick's question.

"Arms are not a part of the outfit, although some of the men who are in rough sections carry a service revolver. You will have no need of that, as I do not anticipate that you will have any danger. Practically all the Rangers, however, carry a rifle partly for protection against animals, but largely for the shooting of small game for food. The more you can depend on your rifle and fishing lines for food, the less stuff you have to tote on your backs from the town. Then in case you need to protect yourself in any way, your rifle is sufficient.

I would suggest that you take two rifles and one shotgun."

"What kind of animals are there in that neck of the woods, Dad?" asked Garry.

"Why there are the usual small fry, and some deer, although the closed season is on them, and occasionally there are bears. There are no moose there now; those are nearer the Canadian border, and as a matter of fact, there are few moose left. Those mighty animals once ranged through the forests of Maine, the real kings of the animals, if you ask me, but due to the rapacity of hunters, they have almost died out. Now, however, the state has put a heavy penalty on killing a moose for a ten year period, and I understand that they are returning to greater numbers. Once in a while you will see wildcats, or catamount, as they are properly known. They are vicious animals, and I hope you never run across one. If you do, shoot them quick and sure. Then I hear from some of the men that there are plenty of wild turkeys about there."

"How about equipment, cooking utensils, and apparatus," inquired the practical Phil.

"That is something we can discuss on the way to Portland," returned Mr. Boone. "Just remember that you want very little equipment. Now, since I have an engagement with a buyer who is coming over from Portland, I shall have to ask you boys

to leave here, unless you want me to take the canoe and let you boys walk."

"No, sir," said Dick. "I see enough walking lined up for me in the next three months to last for a long time, and I'll paddle back with you."

The other boys decided not to stay there for supper, but to go back in the canoe, as they were naturally anxious to tell some of their friends about what the summer had in store for them, while Phil wanted to hurry home and tell his parents about the change that had been made in the plans.

Mr. Boone took a paddle and went into the bow, while Garry took his seat in the stern. Phil and Dick were to ride as passengers.

"This is what I call the life," said Dick as he curled up on the cushions in the bottom of the frail craft.

"Just plumb lazy is what you are, Dick," said Phil with a laugh. "Never mind, enjoy it while you can for you have some real work cut out for you during the coming summer."

They soon reached the boathouse, and pulling up the canoe, set out for the village. Just before Phil left them to go home, he asked Mr. Boone if he would have time to arrange matters with the Chief Ranger so that they could plan on setting out soon.

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Boone, "I was so sure that you boys would like my idea that I

wrote to the Ranger just after lunch. How's that for quick action?"

"That suits us fine," exclaimed Garry. "I only wish that it was Monday so we could go into Portland and get what we will need for the trip."

The chums separated, Phil to go home and tell his mother, and Garry, Dick and Mr. Boone to the Boone residence.

CHAPTER VI.

OUTFITTING FOR THE TRIP.

THE boys were so filled with enthusiasm and anxiety to begin their summer's work, that Sunday seemed a long day. They went to church and at the conclusion of the services walked toward home with several of their friends. On the way they joined Jenny Curtis, one of the most popular girls in the high school, or the whole village for that matter.

Dick told her about the proposed plan to act as Rangers for three months in the woods of Maine. She was very much interested and chattered at great length on the good times that boys could have and that were denied to girls.

"Never mind," Dick told her, "I'll bring you a souvenir from the woods. What will it be?"

"Are there any bears in the part of the state you are going to?" she asked.

"Hundreds," replied Dick, chaffing her. "They are so thick that you can't take a step without bumping into one of them."

"Oh, that's fine, then I know what I want for a souvenir from your trip. Bring me back a nice big bear skin that I can use for a rug in my room."

Their conversation was overheard by the other girls and boys, and immediately they crowded around, each one with a request for a souvenir, ranging all the way from antlers to a package of balsam branches to make pillows of.

The boys laughed and promised that as far as they were able, they would bring back something for each one of their friends. Dick remarked to Garry that if they kept all their promises, they would have to charter a special train to bring home the spoils in.

Most of the remaining day was passed in talking over plans and wishing that it was Monday, so that they could ride into Portland and buy their necessary outfit. In the late afternoon they repaired to the cabin up the river, for Phil, who was an ardent fisherman, as, indeed, were all the boys, wanted to get his fly book.

Dick and Garry watched interestedly while Phil went through his fly book, picking from among the glowing bits of metal and feather, the flies that he thought they would be apt to need.

They rummaged around the closet that they had built in the shack, and chose necessary lines and fishing tackle. They decided that they would take only one rod, for two reasons, first because they

would have enough stuff to carry, and second because Phil had an idea that they could catch a great deal of the necessary fish for food by setting night lines across the stream that they understood was near the shack in which they would make their home. Later they went to Garry's house, and proceeded to give their rifles and the shotgun a thorough cleaning and oiling.

While they were at this occupation in the basement, Mr. Boone heard them talking and came down to visit for a few minutes. He talked with them for several minutes about old hunting days in Maine when the moose roamed freely through the woods. Mr. Boone had been a great hunter in his day, as the fine antlers and heads on the walls of his study gave ample evidence. Finally he got up to go, and told the boys to plan to be ready to start for Portland in the machine at seven the next morning.

"I am having you make an early start as I want you to get all your purchases made before noon. Then we will have lunch and you boys had better take in a movie or a show, as it will be the last one that you will see till you come back from your summer's work. Then, too, I have a very important business engagement, and I want to superintend your purchases, for I have an idea that if I left you alone in the sporting store, the clerks would load all kinds of unnecessary things on you, and the gol-

den rule of a summer in the woods is not to be burdened with too many utensils and too much of an outfit. You will thank me after you get there that you haven't a great load of stuff to carry.

"We won't have much of a chance to carry any reading matter with us, will we, Dad?" asked Garry of his father.

"No, I am afraid not," answered the elder Boone. "If one of you were going alone, I would advocate carrying something. Many of the college boys who go carry a few of their text books, and get a good start on the next year's work, but there will be three of you and you will naturally be company for one another. However, I have a little present that I think you will find a lot of pleasure in before the summer is over."

Mr. Boone went upstairs and returned shortly with two small leather objects that looked like small books. When opened they proved to be a pocket chess board and pocket checkerboard with little pieces that fitted into small slots in the boards.

"I know that you boys play both games, and these will be much more convenient than a large board and the necessary boxes to carry the pieces in. I haven't played with these for years, but I used to find that they whiled away many weary hours on trains."

The trio thanked him for his thoughtfulness, and

Phil declared that he was going to find room for at least one book in his outfit.

"What will that be?" queried Mr. Boone.

"It's a book on woodcraft," replied the dark eyed boy. "I haven't read it for some time, and I think that on the train going to Millinocket I will go through it and brush up my knowledge of the subject."

"It's a very good idea," Mr. Boone told him. "There may be a time when it will come in very handy. As a matter of fact, if I did not know that you had a good knowledge of the subject, I would not be inclined to let you go alone into the woods so far away from civilization."

Night came at last and they all went to bed early, in preparation for their seven o'clock start in the morning. Garry's last remark to Dick before he dropped asleep was:

"Dad thinks we will have just a quiet jolly vacation, but hope he is wrong, I want to have some sort of adventures before the summer is out, other than just the fun of camping."

"Same here," murmured Dick, who was already half asleep.

In the morning, Garry awoke with a start. The sun was streaming in the windows, and for a moment he thought that they had overslept, but a glance at the clock showed him that it was only a

few minutes of six. He rushed over to Dick's bed and proceeded to haul the fat youth out. They made short work of dressing, and rushed down stairs to breakfast. When they reached the breakfast room they heard a volley of barks outside the door. Garry immediately shouted:

"Sandy must be back from the veterinary."

Sandy was the big Airedale belonging to the boys. Some days previously he had developed a bad cough, and Mr. Boone had decided that he should be cared for by the veterinary.

"I forgot all about him in the excitement of the trip," exclaimed Dick. "I wonder if we can take him to the woods with us; let's ask Dad." Dick always called Mr. Boone Dad, as that had been the request of the man who was his guardian since the disappearance of his own father when he was only a youngster.

Mr. Boone came into breakfast at that moment, and the boys put the question to him.

"Certainly you should take him along with you. He would be very lonesome all summer without you, and you will find that there is no better dog for the woods than an Airedale. Of course, he is not a wonderful hunting dog, but the Airedale's trait of sticking close to his owners will keep him from running away into the woods and getting lost, and

he will be a measure of protection as well as company."

Breakfast over, the boys piled into the car, Garry driving, and bowled over the road to Portland. They made the run in about an hour and repaired to one of the department stores, being almost the first customers there. Here, after being advised by Mr. Boone, they each purchased a heavy khaki suit, consisting of trousers and a coat with large patch pockets, the flaps of which buttoned securely. Each boy also provided himself with a couple of heavy flannel shirts. This, too, was on the advice of Mr. Boone, although the boys were at first inclined to think that they should have cotton shirts. Mr. Boone, however, told them that it was never as hot in the woods as it was on city streets, or along the dusty roads near towns. He pointed out, too, the fact that the soldiers always wore them even on the hottest days in the camps in Texas, and that long experience had proved them to be the best for hot weather. In case they got wet from perspiration, or from the boys being caught in a sudden rain, they dried quickly.

"I have known old Down East sailors who told me that they wore heavy jerseys even in the Indian ocean, and that they kept much cooler than would be supposed," Mr. Boone told them.

This concluded their purchases at the department

store, and they went to a sporting goods store to get the remaining articles that they needed.

At the sport shop, a bright young clerk, on being informed that they were to spend the summer in the woods, immediately ran off a list of things he told them they would need.

This included everything from portable stoves to nested aluminum cooking utensils, and dozens of things that would have required a dozen guides to carry in for them.

Mr. Boone laughed and told the salesman they were not going on a camping trip after the fashion of millionaires, but were going in as Rangers. The clerk looked surprised at the fact, and remarked that they looked a trifle young. Mr. Boone told him it was a fact the boys were not as old as the Rangers usually were, but that they were going in on his land. He further informed the clerk that he was an old woodsman himself, and had no intention of buying a lot of useless stuff.

The clerk changed his ideas immediately, and looking at Mr. Boone with a great deal of respect, laughed and told him that the average campers bought all sorts of useless stuff, and he sold them whatever they asked for.

"Of course, sir," said the clerk, "you have the right idea in traveling light, so there are really not a great many things that you will need. A few

simple cooking utensils, axes and stout knives, and some fishing tackle. Are you already furnished with rifles?"

On being told that the boys had both fishing tackle and rifles, he showed them some woods axes that were light, yet of the best procurable material. These were fitted with a leather guard and slot to be attached to the belt. For knives, the boys procured heavy Boy Scout knives, which although designed for boys had proven immensely popular in the army during the war. These contained two heavy blades, a corkscrew and can opener, and an attachment in the nature of a small drill. The knives had a metal loop at one end so that they could be attached to a lanyard. This meant that the boys would be in little danger of losing their knives at a time when they might be in greatest need of them.

"For cooking I advise you to get a good large coffee pot, a substantial skillet, or frying pan, and about three good cooking pots. In aluminum they come a trifle higher than most materials, but in the long run it is worth the difference, both for the wearing qualities and for the light weight, that makes them easier to carry."

The clerk showed the boys the cooking pots, which were specially constructed for camping purposes. They came in sets of three, nested one

within the other, and with a patent handle that folded around the pots when they were not in use.

Mr. Boone pronounced them perfect, and advised the boys to get two sets, since one would be needed at the cabin, while they would want the other to take along when they were on an extended patrol and would have to cook while on the way, over an open campfire. They also procured two skillets and coffee pots. This, Mr. Boone declared, would be amply sufficient for all the cooking that they would want to do.

"As for a beanpot, you can get that at Millinocket and save the trouble of carrying it farther than you need," Mr. Boone told them. "Also, you will find blankets at the co-operative store there. There are bunks built in at the cabin, and your first job will be to look for some balsam branches over which you can spread your blankets. You will find that a quantity of very small balsam branches beats any mattress ever made. The clerks at the store will be able to advise you as to the kind and quantity of food supplies that you will need."

"Now," said the clerk, "you will need ammunition, and except for that I know of only one more thing that you will want, or rather one apiece."

He led them to the rear of the store, and showed Mr. Boone and the boys a compact knapsack with straps, through which they could thrust their arms

and a strap that crossed the breast to hold the shoulder straps in place.

"We have had these knapsacks made especially for our stores," the clerk told them. "They are made of the most durable material and yet their weight is comparatively little. The strap arrangement distributes weight evenly about the back and shoulders, and causes no hard strain on the body. The best point, however, is the fact, that they might be called an extension knapsack. When opened wide, they will hold a great deal of stuff, but for a short trip, you will notice that along the bottom there is a heavily sewed strip with several sprocket holes. This strip is lifted up over the back, where it is attached to the knapsack by means of these studs, which work just the same as those with which you fasten your weather sides on an automobile. You see it makes the knapsack just half its original size."

Mr. Boone examined it carefully, and pronounced it one of the best he had ever seen. This concluded the purchases, and the boys said they would return that afternoon late, to get them.

"What is the name," asked the clerk.

"Let's have them left in Garry's name," suggested Phil. "Then we can have them put all in one package and save trouble."

"Oh, you are the fellows who had the time with

those hoboes over in Colfax, aren't you," said the clerk in a surprised tone. "I read about it in the Express last week. I guess I'll change my mind. You boys will surely be able to take care of yourselves in the woods."

On the way out, the boys glanced at the store windows and saw there several coiled ropes with a sign proclaiming them to be genuine western lariats. "That's the one thing we need," said Garry. "About face and back to the store."

"Do you fellows think you are going out west on the range?" asked Mr. Boone with a laugh. "All the Indians in Maine are tame, and the only cattle are on the farms."

"Still you never know when a good length of rope will come in handy, Dad. I think we might find many uses for them, not as lariats, but because it is strong light rope, and would carry easily attached to the belt."

"Of course, go ahead," returned his father. "I was just having a little joke at your expense."

The boys bought the lariats and then decided to have lunch and go to the matinee at the Jefferson Theatre.

After lunch, Mr. Boone left them to keep his business engagement, and arranged to meet the boys at five o'clock at the sporting goods store.

Following the matinee, which the boys thor-

oughly enjoyed, as the stock company that summer was especially good, they met Mr. Boone, and after a pleasant drive home, went early to bed, as they had had a long day. Now that their outfits had been bought, the journey seemed much nearer, for they had only one day left to arrange for the trip and to say goodbye to their many friends, so with thrills of anticipation, the boys went to their beds to sleep and perhaps to dream of the long days in the woods that lay ahead of them.

CHAPTER VII.

OFF FOR THE WOODS.

TUESDAY the boys gathered at the Boone home and arranged their outfits, for they decided that they would don their clothes before they left home and leave that much extra luggage behind them. As they went over the various items, they discovered they had made no provision for footwear. Mr. Boone was at home that day, not having gone into Portland as was his general custom. The boys went to him and told him of the forgotten shoe-packs.

"No, I did not forget about them yesterday, as you could not have found suitable ones in that city," was his answer. "It will be better for you to get them either in Bangor or Millinocket. You will leave here on the eight o'clock Maine Central train, reaching Augusta at about ten thirty. You can transact your business at the capitol in a short time, lunch at the Kennebec House, and take the one o'clock train for Bangor. You will get into Bangor about five o'clock and I would advise you to

go straight from the station over to Canal street. There you will find numerous stores where the lumber jacks outfit for the winter's work. Stay over night in Bangor, better go to the Penobscot Exchange and sleep there and make an early start for Millinocket. It isn't much over sixty miles to Millinocket, but the train service in that part of the state is slow, so take the earliest train you can.

"Finish your outfitting at the co-operative store there and go to bed early, for the earlier you start on a long hike the better the traveling will be. Leave Millinocket as soon as day breaks, for it will be cooler, and you can afford then to take a rest during the hot part of the day. Your hardest work will be the long trek to the woods. I am sorry that I mislead you a little the other day when I said that it was forty-five miles to the mountain. I have been calculating the distance, and find that it is nearer sixty miles, so by all means hire a buckboard to carry you the first twenty miles or so, then cache a part of your stuff and hike to the cabin. The whole journey will take about three days. Get a day's rest and leave one of you behind, while the other two return for the remainder of your supplies. You need have no fear of caching your stuff and leaving it, for according to the law of the woods, it is inviolate, and dire vengeance is meted out on any one who steals a man's cached goods."

The boys noted everything that Mr. Boone told them and started for the village to bid their friends goodbye. Nearly everyone had some advice to give them, and some of it caused the boys many a laugh, coming as it did from people who had never been in the great woods.

One bit of advice, or rather one gift, was much appreciated by the boys. They went into the drug store to say goodbye to the proprietor and because Dick wanted ice cream. While there the druggist presented them with a small but compact first aid kit.

"No telling when one of you boys will cut yourself or something like that, so I thought that this might come in handy. There's probably more stuff than you will need, but there's nothing like being on the safe side. You will find everything in the way of adhesive tape and bandages and salve for burns or stings. You boys ought to know enough to keep out of poison ivy, but in case you fall into a patch of it, there's a lotion I make myself that's read good for it."

Garry thanked Mr. Hopkins for his kindness, and the chums resumed their round of the village.

At last all their goodbyes had been said and the boys went to their homes, at least Dick and Garry did, while Phil went to the store to give his father a little help for the last time that summer.

When Dick and Garry reached home, they were met by Dinah, the ebony-colored cook of the Boone family, an old Southern negress who had prepared a special meal that night in honor of the boy's final dinner at home for the summer.

"Marse Dick, while you and Marse Garry's perusing 'round them woods, I'se feared you'll forget all 'bout Dinah's cooking, so I'se put some bottles of mah strawbry jam in yo' bags. I know Marse Dick's powerful fond of that jam, and 'twont take up much room."

Both Garry and Dick thanked the old cook for her thoughtfulness, and Garry, laughing, said:

"Since Dick is so fond of that jam, he'll have to carry it himself."

"All right, then those who have to do the carrying will do all the eating," retorted Dick.

Seeing that the joke was on him, Garry hastened to change his statement, which sent the old cook off in high good humor, to see the tables so neatly turned on Garry.

Mrs. Boone had invited the Durants over for dinner, so there was quite a family gathering at the table. Naturally the talk ran largely to plans of the boys, and both Mrs. Boone and Mrs. Durant repeated over and over various bits of advice to the lads, cautioning them about this and about that, advice to which the boys gave careful heed, knowing

that mothers often worry more about their sons than is really necessary, but it is a way that mothers the world over have.

The next day the boys were up almost at daylight, for this was the actual start of the trip. Mr. Boone was to drive them to Portland, where they would take the train for "Gusty," as practically every Maine native terms Augusta, the state capitol. They said goodbye to Mrs. Boone, and then drove to Phil's house to pick him up. Here goodbyes were said to Mr. and Mrs. Durant, and soon they were whirling over the road to Maine's biggest city.

They attracted quite a bit of attention as they boarded the up train from Boston, both from the people awaiting other trains at the depot, and from their fellow passengers. Clad in their khaki suits, and with their rifles and knapsacks, they made a fine manly looking trio, and many admiring comments were made.

"Well, goodbye, boys," said Mr. Boone. "Take good care of yourselves, and if I can make it, I will come and visit you for a day or two in about a month, as I will have to make a business trip up the state about that time."

The boys waved him a goodbye, and then they were off for a summer destined to be full of action and adventure, but adventure that they little dreamed of at that time.

The boys were so full of talk over the coming summer, that the ride to Augusta seemed very short. They arrived in the capital on time, and on Garry's advice, checked their knapsacks and rifles at the station, and made their way to the state house. They might have taken the street cars, but as Phil had never been in the city, he asked them to walk, so that they might see a little more of the city, as they had ample time. The others agreed, so they set out. About the first thing the chums noted was the fact that there seemed to be nothing but hills there.

"Whew," puffed Dick as they climbed. "According to the history books, Rome was built on seven hills. It had nothing on Augusta. I'll bet this city is built on seventeen."

At the state house they were obliged to wait a little while before they could see the State Ranger, and they spent their time in looking over the historic old building. An obliging guard opened up both the Senate Chamber and that of the House of Representatives. They were especially interested in the exhibit in one of the halls of the various flags that had been carried by Maine regiments in the different wars which the United States had participated in.

They returned to the State Ranger's office, and were immediately shown in.

He first shook hands with Garry.

"I am glad to see you. I have known your father a long time, and have a great admiration for him. He has done more in the way of forest conservation and forest fire protection than any other man in the state," he said. "So you boys want to be Rangers for a while. It is rather unusual for boys of your age to do this sort of work, but you look like reliable fellows, and you are huskier than many a chap a lot older. At any rate, you look as though you were no strangers to football and boats, and I guess you will be able to do the work all right. I would not have considered the matter for a minute, except that I have the highest regard for Mr. Boone's judgment, and if he is willing to trust the protection of his land to you, why that's good enough for me.

"I don't know much that I can say to you. Mr. Boone has probably told you a good bit about the work, and the only thing I can impress on you is that you boys are in a way soldiers. You have authority to enforce the forest fire laws on campers, or for that matter, anyone within your territory, hunters, trappers and squatters. Since you are to enforce others to obey the law, the first thing to do is to obey it yourselves. I suppose you have rifles or something of that sort, and so I take it that you mean to live somewhat off the results of your gun-

ning. That's all well and good, but before you go I'll give you a copy of the game laws of the state. Read them over, and see that you don't break them. We had some trouble with Rangers three or four years ago, as one or two of them seemed to think that their position freed them from obedience, and they shot several deer.

"As a result of that we impress it on each new Ranger, and have had drawn up an oath of office. So if you will raise your right hands, I will proceed to swear you into the Ranger Service of the state."

The Chief Ranger then led the boys to a big map spread on one of the walls. This map was of a section of land some twenty miles square, and was criss-crossed with lines, each line running lengthwise being lettered, while the cross lines were numbered. It was thus possible to refer to any plot of ground in the section, such as A-7 or C-9.

Hills, rivers and bodies of water were prominently marked, so that landmarks could be readily recognized.

"You understand," said the Ranger, "that one of you must be in the lookout house on the top of Sourdehonq Hill from 6:30 a. m., until dusk. Here is a map of that section that you must take with you, and I would advise that you study it carefully together as you ride on the train. By a little care-

ful study, you will be able to identify all the landmarks of that section. Before you go, you will also be provided with a long range spyglass, such as was used by our old time sea men. It is the duty of the lookout to keep a constant watch on the surrounding country, and if he 'spots' a fire, he is to telephone to the Section Ranger. There is a telephone in the lookout house, and a list of calls encased in a glass fronted frame, with full directions as to how to get in touch with the Deputy Ranger."

"I have had a man cover that territory and all the lines are in order. Mr. Boone has also strung several wires on the section, so that a small carry 'phone may be attached and a message sent to the lookout, who will relay it to the deputy. Soon I hope that practically every land owner, or else the state, will have such wires strung up. The carrying 'phone is locked up in a heavy cupboard in the cabin. The cabin has been fixed up for the summer by the line-man who covered that section about two weeks ago."

"I have no objection to your taking turns in the lookout house, only one of you must be there all the time every day. In case of two or three days' heavy rain, you don't have to go to the lookout house, and that also frees the patrolmen from duty.

"The trail of the patrolmen has been carefully marked out also on this map, and previous Rangers have blazed the trail, so that you will have no dif-

difficulty in following it. About eleven miles you make by water. Your canoe is in the cabin, and you will have to carry it about twelve miles. That is the hardest thing you will have to contend with at the outset, but it won't bother you much I guess. You ought to make it in a day easy, since there are two of you."

"I do not think of anything else that I need to tell you. In case you find yourself in any difficulty, just 'phone to the Deputy Ranger for advice. And now goodbye and good luck to you."

The boys shook hands with the Ranger and went off to lunch, after which they found that they had about an hour to spare, so they spent it in wandering about the town. They had much fun at Dick's expense, for he insisted on going in every drug or candy store that they passed for ice cream.

He took the the chaffing in a good natured fashion, and reminded them that they wouldn't see ice cream for three months or more. This was putting a decidedly new angle on the case, so the boys made no more objections whenever Dick spotted a drug store.

Train time came quickly and soon the boys were on their way to Bangor, the next to the last stop on their journey to the Great Woods.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD GUIDE.

ARRIVED at Bangor, the boys checked their dunnage and hustled over to Canal Street. Here they found numerous stores that dealt in blankets, boots, moccasins, mackinaws and all manner of supplies for woodsmen. They went to a store kept by an old son of Erin named Tim Donohue. Here they purchased their shoe packs, and then they recollected that they had forgotten to take the compasses that Mr. Boone had laid out for them.

"Sure," said Tim, "That's wan of the most important things of the whole outfit." He turned to Garry. "You have already fitted your fate with the packs, so you'd better hustle up two streets an' turn to the right wan block. Ye'll find there a joolery store where ye'll tell them to give ye three compasses like Tim Donohue always sends for. An' if ye tell him that he'll make the price right for you."

Garry did as the genial old Irishman bade him, and soon returned, to find the boys all fitted. The

street shoes they had been wearing were wrapped up, and left with Tim to be sent to their home by parcel post.

"Now," said Garry, "how about a movie for the last time this summer?"

The boys agreed with a whoop and started out in quest of one, first stopping to eat. While they had attracted a great deal of comment in Portland, in Bangor no one gave them a second look, for the people of that city have been used to such sights for scores of years. Bangor is the setting out point for practically all parties for the Big Woods. Lumberjacks outfit there, and all hunting parties make that their starting point. The boys noted several other men garbed much the same as they were and wondered if they too were Rangers.

At the hotel after the picture show, they inquired of the clerk about trains for Millinocket and found that the best one left at eight fifteen, getting them to Millinocket shortly before noon. The clerk asked them what part they were going to and they told him. On hearing this, he said they had an easy place to get to. A party had started out the day before, who were going clear to the border to guard a stretch of virgin forest land where the axe of the lumberjack had never struck.

The boys breakfasted early, and embarked on the last lap of train journeying. On previous trains they

had had to leave Sandy in the baggage car, but the station agent told them that if they were willing to ride to Millinocket in the smoking car, they could have the big Airedale in the car with them. This they elected to do, even though they knew the smoke would be thick and the car hot.

They found the car almost full, but succeeded in finding a double seat which they promptly took. Just before the train started an old, grizzled man asked them if he could share the seat. The boys told him it was unoccupied, and that he was welcome to it. For a time the old man sat and smoked in silence. The boys, meantime, were pouring over the map and chattering volubly about the different directions and marks.

The old-timer looked them all over, and then to make conversation inquired:

"Camping party?"

"No, sir, Ranger Service," answered Garry.

The old man looked surprised.

"Ain't you fellows pretty young for that?" he asked.

"That's what pretty nearly everyone has told us for the past few days," said Garry, "but we figure to take care of ourselves and do our duty."

"Wall, mebbe, you're husky looking, and yet I don't see why I should be one to say anything about youngsters starting out to the woods. I could

swing an axe, take my end at a double saw, and handle a peavey stick with the best of them when I was sixteen."

The boys mentally calculated that the old timer must be nearly sixty now, so he must have spent long years in the woods. Immediately they began to fire questions at him, asking him about the country, and if it was changed a great deal in the years that he had known it.

"To be sure," said the old man, "I knew these woods when you could walk countless miles, without ever the sight of a white man. Occasionally you could find a few Indian trappers, peaceable of course, but generally you would never see a soul. Then the settlers began to take up land and clear it of timber, not so much for the wood, but to start farms. Then the day of the logger came in full blast, and they swept through part of the state like a hurricane. Little different now, since the government took aholt. There was times, though, when they hated the rules about what trees they could cut, and went on cutting, but the time soon came when the big interests saw that they wouldn't have any more poles to cut, so they began to help enforce the conservation laws. Most of them are pretty pleased with the way it was worked out, but you'll still find a few smaller owners that go ahead and cut clean through. What you fellows name yourself. My

name's Webster, first name Nathan, occupation, guide, and if I do say it myself, one of the best in this neck of the woods."

Garry proceeded to introduce his companions first. He named Phil.

"Durant, any relation to the Rockland Durants?"

Phil replied that he had none in the state as far as he knew, and then Garry introduced Dick. The old guide knew some Wallaces in Millinocket, and was disappointed to find that Dick was no relation. The old timer had the Maine Yankee's trait of trying to find out who your relatives were.

"Don't seem to know any of your people," he told the boys. Then to Garry, "but you haven't told me your name yet."

"My name is Garfield Boone, Garry to my friends."

The usual question came. "Any kin to Garry Boone, who owns the Federal Pulp Company?"

"Yes, sir, his son."

The old man was delighted. "Wall, I vow, I thought it strange at first that I could see three Maine boys with names I knew and not be able to find out they had kin that I knew. Young man, next time you see your Dad you ask him if he remembers Nate Webster, and see what he says. Why, boy, do you know that I owe my life to 'Moose' Boone?"

The boys immediately scented a story, and leaned forward excitedly.

"We'd like to hear about it, sir," said Garry, "but will you first tell us why you call my father 'Moose' Boone, I never heard him called that before."

The old man refilled his pipe preparatory to telling the story. Probably there are no people in the world who would rather spin a yarn or tell a tale than the Maine sea captains or old Maine guides. For most of them, their whole life has been a story. Then the old man began.

"It must have been more than twenty-five year ago. Your father warn't more than a stripling then, but a leetle older than you, Garry, you don't mind my calling you that since I'm so well acquainted with your Dad.

"Your Dad was surveying then, and I was along with him to carry the rod, as I knew that country and had been trapping there. It was summer and work was slack, so I was glad of the job. Those were the days when deer and moose and all kind of woods animals were in greater numbers than they are now. In fact there were even caribou in those days, but they are nearly all dead. Those pesky city hunters pretty nigh killed everything off, never used any judgment about the time of the year they killed; breeding time made no difference to them.

"We'd been out for some time, and meat was all gone, so Boone and I took a few hours off and set out to see if we couldn't find a b'ar that we could kill and have a fresh b'ar steak. Finally we found what seemed to be two sets o' tracks and Boone took one track while I took the other.

"I was going along cautious-like, for my tracks were mighty fresh and I knew that Mr. B'ar warn't very far off. I came out into a bit of clearing near a spring, and then I nearly fell over with surprise. Right there, drinking, was the biggest moose I ever laid eyes on. There was no law then on moose, and I thought that for food, moose meat was better than tough steak, and so I lifted up my rifle to let fly. Then something happened that I was mighty ashamed of forever after. I got buck fever like a city chap on his first hunting trip, and I shook just enough to spile my aim, so instead of dropping that moose in his tracks, I just hurt him pretty bad.

"Now I don't think there is anything more dangerous than a wounded moose, and I knew that I had better be hitting out for a tall tree till I could reload my gun. I had no wish to get down so that moose could strike me with those hoofs of his. They tell me that a tiger's claws are like razor blades, and that they can tear to pieces in no time. I don't know much about tigers, never having seen one outside of the circus. But I do know that in this country

there is nothing equal to the hoofs of a moose for death and destruction. They can slash like the keenest razor ever honed. I'd seen a fellow once that ran afoul of a moose, and I tell you my heart almost stopped beating as I figured the distance to a near tree.

"I had to drop my gun, for I knew I was going to need both hands to get up a tree, and I wished I had a dozen more. Just as I started up the tree, the moose came in back of me, full tilt. The wound hadn't hurt him enough to make him drop, just enough to fill him with rage. 'Twas Providence that kept me from being crushed as he hit me, but the only injury I sustained was a sharp tear from one of the prongs of his antlers.

"Then I did the only thing left to do. If I dropped he would have cut me and trampled me to pieces, and I couldn't go up the tree, so I just grabbed him by the antlers and swung myself around on him. I don't know who was the most surprised, the moose or myself. He shook himself in a mighty fashion, but I was hanging on for my life and knew it. Lucky for me a moose never tries to roll over, or he'd a had me. He knew another trick, however, which was to rush me into the trees edging the clearing, and tear me off his antlers, then he could finish me up. I knew what he was up to and gave myself up for a goner, and at that minute

your father, Garry, came into the clearing, as his tracks had led straight to the spring which was a regular watering place for animals.

"He took in the whole show at a glance and then came the minute he saved my life. It took quick thinking and a lot of courage, but there wasn't any time to waste. He had to shoot quick and shoot straight and shoot to kill, and he did it. The moose had just turned for a leap to tall timber when Boone ups with his gun and hit that moose straight through the one spot under the shoulder that meant goodbye to that moose. That king moose dropped in his tracks, and as he dropped I shot over onto the ground and lay there, all the gimp taken out of me. Fact I was so shook up that I warn't much good all that day.

"When we reached the settlement and I told the story, they pinned that name on him, and no old timer ever refers to Garry Boone now as anything but 'Moose' Boone.

"Boone cut off what we would need for meat, some to eat right away and some to dry Indian fashion, and then took the head off."

"Yes," interrupted Garry. "We have that head at home now, but Dad never told us the story of how he got it, except that he shot it long years ago."

"Wall, your Dad always was modest. He carried on a lot about my telling everyone he saved my life,

but I've never forgotten it, and if there's anything I can ever do for his son, or his son's friends, just call on Nate Webster," concluded the old man.

The morning hours sped along as they listened to other tales by the old man, and he also went over the map with them, pointing out the landmarks, and giving them such apt descriptions that they felt as though they had been there and seen them already.

Finally the trainman shout "Millinocket. All off. Leave no packages in the car!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Garry. "Now for the Big Woods."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick, "now for dinner and then to buy our supplies."

"Always ready to eat," laughed Phil. "At any rate we're here, so 'Let's go!'"

CHAPTER IX.

THE GUIDE'S TREACHERY.

DINNER over, Garry, Dick and Phil proceeded at once to the store owned by the Federal Pulp Company. Garry had a letter from his father to the store manager, and after reading it, the manager himself superintended the purchases, telling the boys that Mr. Boone had requested this.

"I imagine that you boys have pretty husky appetites, but there are a lot of delicacies that you will have to do without. You won't be able to have pie, and butter is out of the question. I take it that at least one of you knows how to cook, or you wouldn't be setting off alone to the woods."

"You will want flour, coffee, sugar, a few flitches of bacon, some canned beef, or as our army boys call it, 'canned Willie,' salt, baking powder, some canned shortening in case you want to make biscuits, and I would advise that you take some of those large cans of vegetables, mainly tomatoes, for you will want some sort of food with a little acid in it.

"You will be able to fish quite a bit, so I would advise that you don't eat your bacon every meal, but use it judiciously to grease your skillet with. Take quite a little bacon, for you will also want it to cook beans with. Do you know how to cook beans in a Maine bean hole?"

The boys had often done this at their shack in the strip of woods near home. This interesting process will be described to our readers in a later chapter.

The boys bought in fairly large quantities for there was no telling how soon they could get supplies again. The manager told them that in case they ran short they could 'phone to him through the Deputy Ranger and that he would send supplies to them as far as they could be carried by team, and there would be cached and the boys could come in that far and tote them back.

"I am giving you quantities though that I think will last you quite a while, for you can fish a great deal and if you are any kind of a shot, you can get plenty of squirrels and occasionally a wild turkey or some partridge. There's no danger of your starving. Then for a while you will be able to find plenty of blueberries, and mountain blackberries will be ripe shortly after that. About the only thing else that I can think of is some evaporated milk. You won't want to carry very much of it, and I'd use it mainly in cooking biscuits. Better learn to drink

your coffee black. Also I'll give you a tin with a tight fitting cover. Put your milk in this and sink it in the brook, and it will keep fine."

Following the purchase of the food, the boys procured their blankets, and this made their outfit complete. They advised with the manager on the possibility of getting a team to start out the first thing in the morning. This, the manager told them was not as easy as it sounded.

"They're working double shifts at the mill, and everyone is busy, then the farmers are all in the midst of their busy season. However, there is a chap here who has a horse and buckboard, he's a shiftless no-account sort of a fellow, half French and half Indian. He hasn't a very good name, although he'll do all right for the trip, but he'll charge you pretty well for it."

The boys decided that twenty miles by team would cut down their journey quite considerably, and set out with the manager to interview Jean LeBlanc, for so the guide was named. Luckily they found him, for he was of a roving disposition and was in the woods more than three-quarters of the time.

LeBlanc was a rangy, swarthy man with a perpetually sullen look on his face. He did not seem inclined to make the trip, and made a remark in French to the store manager asking him how much the boys were able to pay. Garry and Dick turned

at once to Phil and were on the point of asking him to translate what the half-breed was saying. Some impulse made Phil put his fingers to his lips, and shake his head, unnoticed by either the guide or the manager. Garry and Dick were puzzled, but kept silence.

The guide held a little more conversation with the manager and then suddenly decided to take the job. He turned to the boys, and in fairly good English, though with a marked accent, told them he would be ready to start at dawn. They arranged to meet at the store where the goods would be loaded on, and make an early start.

After they had left the guide, the manager told them that if they cared to they might visit the paper mills and see how the paper was made. He arranged over the 'phone with the foreman, and as soon as he discovered that a son of one of the owners was there, he told the manager that the boys would be shown every courtesy.

As soon as the chums were alone, Garry's first question to Phil was why he had shook his head when they were going to ask him what the guide said.

"I don't much like the looks of that halfbreed," said Phil, "and so I thought I would keep my knowledge of French a secret. He didn't want to go at first and then he asked the manager what we were

taking with us. The manager told him and figured up the weights and suddenly he decided to go. I think it would be a good idea to keep my knowledge of French under cover. It might come in handy some time, or we might have a lark with some one who does not know that I can understand what he is saying."

The boys went completely through the paper mill, seeing the process from the time the logs were ground into pulp in the great beaters, rolled into thick mats, and piled away to be later made into news print and wrapping paper. This was all done in what was called the pulp mill.

In another mill the pulp mats were again chopped and beaten and finally sent into the long, roaring machine, where they went over and between countless rollers, finally to emerge on great rolls at the end of the machine, thence to be sent to cities great and small to be converted into papers carrying the news of the world.

Between the excitement of the preparations for the trip, and the long train ride, the boys were thoroughly tired, and no sooner finished supper than they retired, leaving a call with the clerk to be awakened an hour before dawn.

The next morning was cool, but gave promise of being hot long before noon, so the boys were anxious to start at once. At the store they found that

LeBlanc had already loaded the long buckboard, and presently with Garry on the seat beside the guide, and Phil and Dick on the back of the buckboard with their legs dangling, they set out for the big woods. Rather than bother with cooking by the wayside the first day, they had had a substantial lunch prepared at the little hotel where they had spent the night, and in the heat of the day, stopped at a shady bank along the road and had their lunch. They rested for about two hours and then took the road again. On the morning trip they had passed several small farms, but as the afternoon waned they turned onto a corduroy road, so called because it is made of logs laid crosswise along the road, and found themselves at the beginning of the big woods, their goal for the past several days.

Late in the afternoon they had covered about twenty miles, and then abruptly the road ceased and the forest, thick and dark, loomed all around them.

"Well, LeBlanc," said Garry. "This seems to be as far as you can go with us. I suppose you'll camp here with us for the night and then go back in the morning?"

The guide was silent for a moment, then he asked suddenly :

"You going to Sourdehonq?" On receiving an affirmative reply, he said. "That's a lot of grub and stuff for three boys to carry in. You give me

twelve dollars more, and I make travois and go with you to mountain. Leave buckboard here. Get it on my way back."

This seemed like a good proposition. True they would have to walk the remaining forty miles, but they would be freed of the burden of carrying their supplies, and it would also eliminate a return trip for such things as they would have to cache.

The bargain was struck, and soon the three boys and the guide were asleep. They were awakened at dawn, and while the Indian, or more properly speaking, the halfbreed built a small fire, Garry rummaged through the supplies and prepared to cook spider bread, coffee and bacon. After breakfast the guide went a bit into the woods, and presently returned with two stout long saplings. Midway down the two saplings, which had been laid on the ground about three feet apart, he laid a number of smaller sticks crosswise, tying these securely. They were tied in such a manner that when the job was completed, the saplings were not parallel, but there was a much wider gap at one end. Where the gap was narrower, he hauled over the horse's flanks, and attached these ends to the horse's collar. The two free ends dragged on the ground. The supplies were then securely bundled in one of the blankets, and this was lashed to the little platform made by tying on the sticks crosswise.

Thus was the travois complete, a vehicle that had been used on countless miles of travel by LeBlanc's Indian ancestry.

The day passed uneventfully. Trudging behind the travois, the boys swung along mile after mile. They marched after the fashion of the United States Army, that is a fifty minute walk, and then a ten minute rest, with an hour at noon.

Cooking was done over a small fire, and consisted of the usual bacon and coffee, with flapjacks instead of the spider bread. The pine needles underneath their feet were brown and dry, as it had not rained for about two weeks. It was the kind of weather when the Forest Rangers were especially on the alert. It was after a dry spell that the greatest danger existed.

LeBlanc always built the fire, and the careful way he did it showed him to be a woodsman of long standing. First he scraped away all the pine needles until he had a patch on the bare earth big enough to light his fire. This fire was never a very large one, as he added only a little fuel at a time, to prevent sparks from blowing away, and then when there was a glowing bed of coals, pronounced it ready for the cooking.

The horse was fed, and then the boys wrapped up in their blankets for sleep. They talked for a while, and asked LeBlanc what distance they had covered.

To their surprise they found they made nearly twenty-five miles. But they had walked at a steady trudge since dawn, and did not make ready for camp until almost dark.

They had been asleep for some time, when all of a sudden Garry awoke with a start. They had camped in a slight clearing near a spring, and the faint light of the moon showed him a sight that made him start with surprise. He cautiously reached over to where Dick was asleep, put one hand over his mouth and then shook him. Dick awoke with a start, and the hand over his mouth warned him to keep still. The same process was used on Phil, and then the boys looked around to see what all the trouble was about. They met a sight that astonished them. Sandy's still body lay near them, but there was no sign of horse, travois, supplies or guide.

CHAPTER X.

LE BLANC THREATENS TROUBLE.

GARRY was the first one to awaken to a realization of their plight. He was not so much bothered by the disappearance of the supplies, as by the fact that it would mean a trip back to Millinocket and the consequent loss of several days before they could start their duties. He knew that they ought to be on the job, as the dry weather was a menace to the woods. These thoughts flashed through his mind, and then he prepared for action.

"Dick, you see if Sandy has been killed, while Phil and I see if we can find anything in the nature of a trail," he ordered.

Fortunately the boys had kept their rifles by them when they went to sleep. These they secured and then Phil's keen eyes were soon sweeping the ground for a trace of the departed guide.

At that moment Dick called out:

"Sandy's stirring. He has a nasty gash on the head, but is still alive. That means that LeBlanc

cannot have been gone long, for Sandy was just knocked out, and a dog would not stay under as long as a human." Phil, meantime was on his hands and knees and at last he found the trail through the pine needles where the heavy travois had dragged over them.

The boys grasped their rifles, determined to find the treacherous guide and reclaim their supplies.

The trail did not lead back to Millinocket, but led off into the woods at an angle.

"LeBlanc knows these woods so well that he is probably making for some haunt of his own," said Garry to his companions. "Still in the dark he cannot make very good time, and then he has the horse to guide. He must have figured that he had killed Sandy and that we would sleep until morning and give him time to make his getaway. I am afraid that we will not be able to find him, as these trees are so dense that the moonlight doesn't come in."

At that moment they broke through into a space where the trees had thinned out somewhat, and the straggling light of the moon showed the ground very faintly at their feet. Phil was again on his hands and knees, and a low shout of triumph rewarded the chums.

"Here's the trail again, and while I am no Indian, I would say that it had been made just a few

moments ago. Let's keep silent, and follow through what seems to be a partly worn trail at the end of this clearing," he said.

"I am afraid that we're up against it. If it was daylight we might stand a chance," remarked Dick disconsolately.

At that minute luck was with them, and they heard a faint crashing, as though someone was forcing his way through the brush. They immediately set off at as fast a pace as was possible over strange country, and drew nearer and nearer the sound. Shortly they came within a few feet of it, and Garry reached out his hand and detained his chums, drawing them near him, whispered:

"We'll make straight for him, and break in on him while he is unaware of us. Chances are good that he thinks we would be afraid to go so far into the woods without knowing where we are going that he has relaxed the vigilance that he started out with. Try not to step on a twig that would break and give us away."

Phil then suggested that they take off their shoe packs. "It may hurt our feet for a few moments, but will give us the silence that we need."

It was the work of only a few seconds to do this and then the boys started for the sound, now a bit fainter. After a few minutes of traveling, they saw ahead of them the shadowy figure of LeBlanc

and the horse. The halfbreed had stopped for a moment and was listening intently. The boys held their breath, fearing to make the slightest motion. Then with a shrug, the halfbreed prepared to resume his journey. A stream of lurid light filtered through the trees, showing that dawn was near.

"Now!" shouted Garry, and with a rush the boys surrounded LeBlanc. They knew that the halfbreed was armed, but he had no chance to reach for his weapon, for the boys had their rifles trained on him.

"Stand away from that horse and hold your hands up," ordered Garry.

Sullenly the halfbreed obeyed, and then telling the boys to stand close to prevent any trick, Garry laid his rifle aside and approached the guide. From the belt of the traitor he drew a wicked hunting knife, and then took his pistol from the pocket of his old jacket.

The guide weighed his chances of attacking the bold youth, but the menace of the two rifles held within a few feet of his head in the steady hands of Phil and Dick caused his good judgment to accept the situation. Garry nervily went through his pockets, and took a number of loose cartridges. Then he opened the chamber of the pistol and emptied out the ammunition. This over, he gave the

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gun back to LeBlanc and commanded him to release the travois from the horse.

The halfbreed had no choice of doing anything else, and muttering continually in French, did as he was ordered.

"Now, LeBlanc, start going," said Garry. "You ought to be put away for the scurvy trick that you nearly succeeded in playing on us, but we're in the woods now, and it is a case of take care of ourselves. However, I warn you to keep away from Millinocket, for the first opportunity I have I am going to let them know of it, so that city won't be healthy for you. We are going to keep a sharp watch for you, and if we catch you within striking distance again, you will get a well deserved punishment."

"Bah, children's talk," grunted LeBlanc.

"Nothing of the sort," said Garry. "It may interest you to know that your treacherous blow did not kill the dog. He is a fighting Airedale, and he never will forget you. He'll know you three years from now, and he'll remember you. So if you are ever within striking distance, he'll attack you."

A momentary gleam of fear came into the guide's eyes. He knew that Garry was speaking the truth, and the dog would always be his mortal enemy.

Day was almost upon them, and the guide started off, leading his horse. He turned to them and said:

"You remember this. Jean LeBlanc never for-

gets, either." Then he added a string of French and started away, still muttering to himself.

"What's he saying, Phil?" demanded Dick.

"Why, most of it was swearing all kinds of vengeance. There was something else too, but I'll tell you about it a bit later when we have a little more time. Just now, I am interested in Sandy and breakfast. Let's get back, or perhaps it would be better for Garry to run on ahead and tend to the dog, and Dick and I will drag the travois back," answered Phil. "We cannot be more than a mile from where we camped for the night."

Garry approved this, and left the boys, starting out on a run. Sandy had been commanded to lay where he was before the boys set out, and even hurt as he was, the obedience of the dog to any command of Garry's was uppermost in his dog mind.

It took Garry only a few minutes to get back, and there he found Sandy. The dog whimpered, and got on his feet unsteadily, waiting for Garry to approach. The boy cuddled the dog for a moment and then examined the wound. It was a nasty blow that the dog had received, and it was a wonder he had not been killed outright. His master washed the cut with cold water from the spring, and then bathed it with arnica from the first aid kit that the Colfax druggist had presented to the boys. Sandy yelped as the arnica bit into the gash, but

he knew that the boy was doing the best for him, and did not struggle.

"There, old boy, I guess that's all I can do. We'll have to let Mother Nature do the rest for you," said Garry as he patted the dog.

This over the boy set about building a fire for the breakfast, and soon his chums returned with the supplies, and breakfast was prepared.

According to the distance that they had covered while LeBlanc was with them, they figured that they still had about thirteen miles to go. Phil had a good idea about packing the supplies for the remainder of the trip.

"There are two things we can do, either cache them here as Mr. Boone suggested and make two trips, or carry them all at once. The first scheme isn't good for two reasons. First it would take two extra days traveling, and second, LeBlanc may be still hanging around, hoping we will do that very thing. A cache may be a sacred thing in the woods, but LeBlanc will not dare to go to Millinocket again for some time, and he will want food, and as he has broken the law once, he would do it again. Dick and I pulled the travois back about a mile, and it rides fairly easily. What I suggest is that two of us pack our knapsacks with as much as we can carry, and the third pull the rest of the stuff on the travois. We can take turns at pulling it a mile at

a time, and it will be an easy matter to make the twelve miles by nightfall."

This was immediately voted on, and the three started out, Garry taking the first turn at hauling the travois. It was clumsy at first, and proved rather a strain on his shoulders, but gradually he got the knack, and then it was easier. Sandy walked occasionally, but was always ready to perch on the bundle on the travois or be carried a short distance by one of the boys.

They trudged along amusing themselves by pacing off the distance they covered, also that they might take equal turns in pulling the travois. Several times they asked Phil to tell them what the guide had said, but he teased them by refusing, and promising to tell them that night when they reached the end of the journey.

At lunch they had the usual coffee and bacon and flapjacks. Dick laughingly grumbled at the sameness of fare, and Phil consoled him by promising fish for breakfast, which would be a welcome change.

"However," he remarked, "you must make up your mind to the same kind of food for three months, and you have been eating it for only three days."

"It seems as if our summer was not to pass without adventure after all," said Dick. "We have just started, and we have made a bitter enemy, just why,

I don't know, unless what Phil is keeping a secret has some bearing on it. So we've made a good start."

"As I make it," said Phil, "we have only about five more miles to go, and there is a climb of about a mile. We ought to make it by nightfall easily, although it will seem harder now that we are nearing the end of the trip, and after a day and half's marching."

But all things must come to an end, and at last the foot of the hill was reached. This served to revive their flagging spirits, and they climbed up the stiff slope with a will. Then, the cabin. The boys cheered, and even Sandy joined in with a prolonged howl.

Here was the goal. The summer's work had begun. What lay ahead of them the boys did not know, but the adventurous start promised a summer of thrills. Their adventures were to lead them far afield through the woods of the Pine Tree State,

CHAPTER XI.

DICK AND THE BEAR.

THE boys were so tired after the long trip, that they just cooked a little food, and then, throwing their blankets on the hard bunks, without going in search of balsam, slept the sleep of healthy tired boys.

The sun was well up before they awoke, and they decided to make things comfortable for their long stay immediately after breakfast was over. Phil then bade them start a fire and get the coffee on while he jointed up his fishing rod, and selecting a fly from his book went out to the stream that flowed near the cabin. It was a typical mountain brook, and a few rods from the house, he found a place where three or four logs had been stretched across to form a rude bridge, probably by some lookout or Ranger, who had occupied the cabin previous to their taking it over. The brook had formed a dark, silent pool at this point, and Phil was sure that a trout or two would be lurking in its depths. Skill-

fully he cast, and after several attempts, felt a sharp tug that told him a fish had taken the fly. He played it for a few moments, and then with a dexterous flip, brought it to him.

For a moment he thrilled with the thought that he had gotten his first mountain trout. It was a beauty, weighing nearly three quarters of a pound, and he could have played it for several minutes, for brook trout are gamy little fellows, and generally put up a fight. Phil, however, at this particular moment, was fishing for food and not for sport. At the end of twenty minutes' work, he had taken three sizable trout from the pool, and hastened back to the cabin.

The boys already had the skillet hot, and Garry had made a mess of flapjacks. Tin dishes had been resurrected from the cupboard, and after greasing the skillet with a bit of bacon, Phil fried the trout and presently served them piping hot for breakfast. The boys were delighted with the change in the bill of fare, and declared the fish to be the best that they had ever tasted. This was not strange, for fish, and especially trout, are far better eating if they are cooked immediately after being caught.

"Now," said Garry after breakfast was over, "the first thing to do is to apportion our duties. The first patrol should start tomorrow morning, for I think we deserve one day's rest. The lookout

cabin must be occupied from today on, and I propose that we draw lots to see who will take the first turn, the other two to make the patrol. Since we are to patrol practically the limits of the territory, I think it would be advisable to make it in two trips, returning to the cabin after each trip and changing patrols. That gives one fellow a rest every little while. I do not think we need to portion out such duties as cooking and work like that, as we can do it from meal to meal. Phil is the best fisherman, and he will have to supply us with fish. What game we get will have to be shot on the patrols, and we can all take turns at the cooking. It will be the duty of the man in the lookout to keep the cabin supplied with wood, and bank the fire mornings when he leaves. Now let's see who gets the first tour of duty on the hilltop."

He went out of the cabin and returned in a short time with three twigs of uneven length, which he held so that the tops only could be seen. Phil drew first, then Dick, and Garry kept the remaining one. It was found that Phil had drawn the shortest twig and was the first to remain. The other twigs showed that Dick would take the second turn, and Garry the last.

"This will be our schedule then for the rest of the summer," said Garry, "barring accidents or sickness, neither of which we anticipate." The boys

agreed and then decided to go to the hilltop with Phil and inspect the lookout shack that would be the daily home for one of them in turn during the rest of the summer. A half hour's climb brought them to the top, and there perched the shack. It had been built on uprights so that a clear view was had of the entire surrounding country. It was made of wood, sheathed with corrugated iron, and immediately the boys nicknamed it the "tin can," for it looked for all the world like a tin biscuit can. Phil adjusted the map, and his next duty was to call the Deputy Ranger on the wire to report that he had gone on watch and to see if the wire was in good condition.

In a short time he had the deputy and gave his name and that of his companions, and told him that the trio would take turns in watching from the lookout.

At the close of the conversation he told the boys that the deputy's name was Anderson, and that he had had reports of two bad fires in other districts, and had cautioned the new Rangers especially to keep a sharp watch. He also said that the deputy had told him to inform the first patrol that there were two camping parties on the Anabasa River, who should be visited and cautioned about the fire laws and the danger of starting indiscriminate camp fires.

After remaining a short time, Dick and Garry departed as Garry had volunteered to bring enough

balsam boughs for the bunks, and Dick had decided that he wanted blueberries for supper. He had seen what looked in the gathering gloom of the night before to be a patch of them near the bottom of the hill. One side of the hill had evidently been burned over two or three years before, and there was only a ragged growth of brush in some spots.

Dick did not bother to carry his rifle, and so armed only with a tin pail, he started on his quest for the succulent berries. He found a patch on one side of a small knoll, and began to pick, working towards the top of the knoll. He had picked for half an hour, as it takes many of the small berries to fill a pail.

While he worked his thoughts wandered to the little village of Colfax, and Mr. and Mrs. Boone and his friends. Then his thoughts turned to promises he and his chums had made to bring souvenirs home with them, and his own particular promise to bring home a bear skin. He wondered how soon he would be able to keep this promise, and determined that he would keep a sharp watch for possible tracks while he was on patrol.

By this time he had almost reached the top of the knoll, and his pail was nearly full of berries. These berries represented almost an hour's work, and seeing a bush of especially large ones, he started

for it, thinking that there were enough to fill the pail to the brim.

Just as he reached the sharp peak of the knoll he received a surprising shock. Lumbering towards him to get at the same bush was a bear!

All Dick's boasts about what he would do when he met his first bear were forgotten. He was not naturally a coward, but the shock of seeing the bear face to face was too much for him. Truth to tell it was only a cub, but to Dick's surprised eyes he looked much bigger. With a wild whoop, the boy threw the can of berries straight at the little bruin, and then turned and raced down the knoll as if a whole legion of bears were after him. He had run several rods before he ventured to turn and see if the bear was gaining on him. Then, breathless he dropped to the ground and began to laugh loud and long.

Running as fast as he was able, was the bear, but, he was running in the opposite direction. The bear had been scared almost as much as the boy.

Dick laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and then with dismay bethought himself of the lost labor of an hour and the scattered berries. He had planned on having them for supper, and knew that the other boys were as eager for them as he was himself.

He determined to put the best face possible on the

matter, and retrieved the pail and started in on the weary task of refilling it. The work seemed twice as hard as at first, but that was largely due to the thought that it had already been done once, and this was merely a repetition of the labor.

Would he tell his chums about the inglorious flight from the bear, was the question that puzzled him. Finally he decided that there was nothing so particularly bad about it, as he had no gun, and discretion is always the better part of valor.

At last he succeeded in filling the pail, and returned to the cabin. Here he found that Garry had cut a number of branches and covered the bunks. The fresh cut boughs imparted a delightful perfume to the cabin, for there is nothing that has as pungently pleasant and strong an odor as the balsam. Garry had also cut up enough firewood to last for several days, although this was to have been the duty of the lookout man. But, as Garry explained to Dick, he had nothing else to do and it helped to pass the time.

Dick recounted his adventure of the bear flight, and Garry laid back on one of the bunks and laughed delightfully. Dick appreciated the joke on himself, and told the entire matter as it happened. Truth to tell, however, the fat boy stretched things a bit when he declared in all seriousness that the bear must have been as big as an elephant. This was

too much for Garry, and he doubled up in another paroxysm of laughter.

"Dick, I think we had better send you back to Millinocket to have your eyes examined. I should like to have seen your friend the bear. I'll wager he was only a baby one. Still, in all justice to you he might have been fairly large, for a bear is not by nature a fighting animal unless he is aroused or wounded, and he was probably as surprised at running across you as you were at seeing him. But there never was a bear in this day and age that came within a few hundred pounds of being as big as an elephant."

The boys passed the afternoon in playing chess, and towards dusk they were rejoined by Phil.

"Not a sign of anything in the way of smoke," reported the lookout. "Now for supper. That lunch I carried with me wasn't enough. Next time I am going to increase the size of the rations. Also tonight we will put some beans to soak and tomorrow night there will be baked beans for supper. Tonight before it gets dark, we must rustle up some stones to cook the beans with."

Phil was also regaled with the story of Dick and the bear, and all through the supper, Garry and he ragged Dick unmercifully, which Dick took in good part. Supper over, the boys fell to talking of Jean

LeBlanc, and wondering where he had gone, when Garry said suddenly:

“By the way, Phil, you haven’t told us what it was that the halfbreed said.”

“Well, I’ll tell you now. We must keep a sharp watch for him, because it was not the food that he wanted, he simply wanted to do us an injury. From what I gather, he has suffered some fancied wrong from your father, Garry, and his action was simply a matter of revenge. Evidently he found out at Millinocket who we were, and his last words as he left us yesterday morning were, ‘I’ll make you pay for “Moose” Boone’s work, young Boone, you and your friends, and some day I’ll get that “Moose” Boone, too.’ Boys, that guide is a bad actor, and means us harm!”

CHAPTER XII.

DICK GETS HIS BEAR SKIN.

THE next morning the boys were up at dawn, and after a hasty breakfast, Phil set about preparing the hole for the bean cooking. Probably no where else do they cook beans after the fashion that they do in the state of Maine.

First a large hole was dug in the ground, and this was lined with stones about the size of a man's head. Then a fire was started in the rock lined pit, and kept replenished until the stones were almost white hot. While Dick and Garry tended to the fire, Phil prepared his beans. This consisted simply of filling up the bean pot, then he added salt and pepper and a good pinch of dry mustard. The mustard he dug up from his knapsack.

"Where did the mustard come from," asked Garry. "I don't remember our getting it at the store in Millinocket."

"No, I planned on having baked beans before we left home, and at the last minute I remembered about

mustard, and raided the pantry for all I could find. You fellows will have to eat your beans white, for we couldn't bring any molasses in," replied Phil in answer to Garry's question. Then he went on fixing his beans. In the top of the beanpot, he put a good sized piece of bacon, and then nothing remained but to fill what space was left in the pot with water.

The hole was then cleaned out and all the embers removed, but the stones retained their intense heat. The bean pot was placed on the bottom layer of stones carefully pushed all around it. The last step was to simply fill in the hole with the earth that had been dug out, and pat it down so that no air could get to the heated stones.

This is the universal way of cooking beans in the Pine Tree State.

The principle is the same as that which caused the invention of the fireless cooker, which is used in so many homes today. The beans would cook slowly all day, and at night all that the boys would have to do would be to dig away the earth, and find their beans cooked to just the proper turn. The process of cooking slowly all day absorbed enough water so that they were perfection. In beans cooked in the oven in the ordinary way, water must be added from time to time, or the beans would shrivel and burn.

The sun had been up barely an hour when the

process of starting the beans to cook was accomplished. The boys decided that it would be all right to take an hour and see if they could come across the bear that had given Dick such a scare the preceding day. Then Dick could return to the "tin can" for his day as lookout, and Phil and Garry could make their first tour of duty.

Dick led the way to the knoll where he had had his laughable adventure, and they decided to penetrate the deep woods that lay just beyond. Fortune was with them, for Phil's sharp eyes soon spotted what he declared were unmistakably bear tracks. Hunting and trailing came naturally to Phil Durant. His grandfather and great grandfather had been among the pioneers who came and settled in the practically virgin land of Canada, when a man's eyes and the ability to follow a trail and then shoot straight and sure were the only means of preserving his life. This was necessary not only to procure meat, but to guard against the hostile Indians with which the Old Dominion abounded at that time.

"This is a likely place to find our bear," remarked Phil. "They are extremely fond of blueberries, and there is undoubtedly a spot around here that is a natural watering place for animals. Sometime we must follow the course of the brook and see where it leads us. Unless I am mistaken it runs near

here somewhere and there undoubtedly we shall run across the bear if luck is with us. Then again it may be days before we come across him."

Phil's prediction about the brook came true, for soon they came to it. There at the waters edge, they discovered fresh bear tracks; the tracks were those of a cub only, and again Dick was chaffed about his "elephant" bear.

The chums decided to wait a bit to see if the water would attract any of the animals that evidently came there frequently. Then if nothing turned up, they would have to postpone their hunting until a later date.

"Unless the bear comes from the same quarter as the wind, he will smell us and not show within a mile of us," declared Garry. "As we are not familiar with the ground here, and have no way of telling from what direction he might approach, the best we can do is trust to chance. Personally, I do not believe we will see Mr. Bruin at all."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when Dick's friend of the day before ambled up to the waters edge, on the other side of the brook. The boys were crouched in a coppice, and held their breath. Dick immediately threw his rifle to his shoulder, and was about to take aim, when Garry stopped him.

"You wouldn't want to shoot such a little fellow

as that, and look, there is a rude rope collar around his neck. I believe that someone must be living about here who may have tamed him, although I was assured, as were all of us, that no one lived in this section of the woods.

Persuaded by Garry, Dick dropped his rifle, and called to the bear, and whistled. The little bruin lifted his head and instead of starting on a run, sat back on his haunches and waited as the boys waded through the brook and approached him. He was assuredly a tame bear, and allowed the boys to touch him. Garry's first act was to examine the collar, and found that it had been made of small ropes braided together.

The cub was a friendly little beast, and permitted the boys to pat him as much as they wished, and even let Garry maul him around a little, seeming to enjoy the rough play.

"I wonder who could have tamed him to such an extent," asked Phil. "It must have been the person who made the collar for him. Wonder if there is some trapper around here. Yet if there were any human habitation around here, it seems as though I would have discovered a trace of smoke when I was in the lookout yesterday."

The boys could only conjecture as to who would be in that neighborhood. It seemed like a pretty mystery that they would soon solve.

Suddenly there was a crashing noise near by that startled them.

Garry was the first to see the cause.

"Look!" he whispered. "There's a bear!"

It was a bear, and a regular old he one. Phil's rifle was at his shoulder in a flash, and though it was an unusual thing for him to do, fired before he had taken a perfect aim. His bullet tore through the fleshy shoulder of the bear and inflicted a painful wound. With a throaty growl, the animal made straight for the boys, while the little cub scampered off in fright. Garry's shotgun was leaning against a rock where he had placed it while he was playing with the cub, but Dick had kept his rifle near him.

The fat boy determined that he would turn the laugh on his companions, and as the bear forged ahead towards them, he took careful aim straight between the eyes of the bear, a vital spot, and fired. The bear fell to the ground, threshed about for a moment, and then lay still. Garry by this time had recovered his gun, while Phil had reloaded. They waited for a moment, but there was no movement on the part of the bear. Dick's well placed bullet had found the most vital spot on an animal, the brain.

Dick was in ecstasy over the exploit.

"There's the bear skin I promised," he shouted

in high glee, "that is unless Phil has a prior claim on him. He fired the first shot."

"No, indeed," warmly protested Phil. "He was your bear by rights. You were the only one to promise a skin, and you were the cause of our coming out this morning to look for one. Besides, I am so ashamed of that poor shot, that I resign all claim to him. It was your bullet that did the trick. One of the good things, too, is the fact that we will have fresh meat for a day or two, and we can dry some of it the way the Indians do with buffalo and venison. I'll skin the bear and cut off the hind-quarters if you fellows can spare an hour. I suppose we ought to go about our duties immediately, but I do not believe there will be any harm in taking an extra hour. We were up early, and haven't been very long."

Dick settled part of the question for them, however. As it was his turn in the "tin can," he started for it immediately, leaving the boys to follow home with the skin and the meat. Before he left, the boys told him that they would go on their patrol immediately after they took the product of the hunt home, and that they would make it their business to return there the next night.

"Don't forget the beans," called Phil.

"Did you ever know me to forget about anything

to eat?" Dick replied as he started off at a trot for the cabin.

Phil and Garry toiled briskly, and soon they had the bear's hide stripped off, and the hindquarters cut away.

"Bear steak is a little tough and rather gamy," said Phil, "but it makes pretty good eating just the same. The skin will be the hardest matter. About all we can do is to scrape it thoroughly and rub some salt on it. It will be crude tanning, but that is the best that can be done. The main thing is to preserve it. Possibly it will be best to cover it with salt as soon as we return to the cabin, and then as soon as we return from the patrol, I will take a hand and finish it up. By the way, Dick is a very fortunate person. By drawing the lot to stay as lookout today, he gets out of the long carry of the canoe from the cabin to the river."

"I had forgotten all about that," returned Garry. "I must confess that I don't look forward to that part of the business with any great pleasure. It will take us the rest of the day, as we will have to make it by easy distances. We can camp by the river's edge tonight, and tomorrow, I believe that we will call it a day by paddling to the limit of the patrol, and warning any camping parties we may see about the fire prevention."

At the cabin, they packed their knapsacks with

provisions to last them till their return, and then set off for the river. Phil had consulted the map, and found on closer inspection that the trail was marked with a letter X. On looking at the legend in the corner of the map, he discovered that this indicated that it had been blazed. Blazing a trail is done by the first person who covers a route. The method is to take a hatchet, and cut a deep gash in a tree every few paces. The gashes are cut about on a level with a person's eye, and are easily followed. Occasionally, a man covering a trail that has been blazed, will take another hack at the notches, to prevent them from becoming obliterated as the tree grows, and bark threatens to cover them.

This particular trail was easy to follow, as the Ranger who had inspected the telephone lines had reblazed the trail. They needed something to make the way easy, for carrying a canoe for a long distance is by no means an easy task, and the boys were forced to stop and rest frequently, for the strain on their shoulders told heavily.

"Whew, but I'm glad this isn't a daily stunt," gasped Garry as they halted for a breathing spell. "Life as a Ranger isn't all milk and honey, is it, Phil, old top?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

DUSK was almost upon them before the boys reached the river bank. They were thankful that the trip was over and that they could get a long night's rest. Garry had been scanning the river bank for any signs of the camping parties, but evidently they had pushed up the stream a way.

Phil in the meantime had cut a slender sapling, and proceeded to tie a length of line to it.

"I don't know that I'll get anything, but there is no harm in trying. There ought to be at least perch or chub here, and there is a good chance of getting a river bass. This makeshift rod wouldn't be much good for a game bass, and I would have to take a chance on landing him if one should bite. I'll try a fly first, and if that doesn't bring anything, you look under the rocks along the river bank there and see if you can find a hellgramite."

Casting with just a sapling and a line tied to it

was not very successful, and for several minutes Phil did not get the sign of a bite. Garry had found two hellgramites, those little black lizard-like bugs that live under the rocks. They have a sort of a jointed coat of armor, and two small horns that project from either side of the head. The flies proving unsuccessful, Phil caught the hook through the ring or armor around the neck of a hellgramite and threw out the freshly baited hook. He was almost instantly rewarded with a sharp bite, and without trying to play the fish, struck sharply, and jerked the line over his head to the bank. It was a bass, and a beauty, weighing close to two pounds.

Garry had made spider bread while Phil was fishing, so the skillet was ready for the fish and bacon. They made a royal supper, and then, wrapped in their blankets, slept the hearty sleep of tired healthy boys.

They were awakened at dawn by the incessant chatter of a bluejay and soon had a fire going for breakfast. Garry was this time the successful fisherman, and as the boys ate, they decided the next time to bring some of the dried bear meat as a change of diet.

The two explored for a time, and then found the beginning of the 'phone line, which evidently ran along the river bank for a short distance and then

turned into the woods. Garry attached the nippers of his carrying 'phone to the line, and after a few moments' ringing, Dick's voice responded.

He told Garry that he had just arrived at the tin can, and that there was nothing to report, but that he would report to the deputy the fact that the boys were on patrol.

Garry told him that they had not yet come across the camping parties that day, but expected to before night-fall. He then asked how Sandy was, and was overjoyed when told that the big Airedale was almost himself again, and was keeping Dick company in the tin can.

"We don't figure to be able to get back before tomorrow noon," Garry told him, "but we will, if there is any chance to make it late tonight."

"Don't worry, everything here is all right, so take as much time as you want," Dick reassured him.

The boys carefully stamped out the fire, and then boarding the canoe, paddled up the river. For about eight miles they went, keeping a sharp lookout along the bank for signs of a camp, but found nothing. Then they noticed a trifle of an increase in the current, and turning a sharp bend, found ahead of them about a hundred feet of rapids.

They pulled into the bank and took stock of the situation. "I see nothing for us to do but to make

a portage here," decided Garry. "I wouldn't mind taking a chance and shooting those rapids if we were with the current, but going against it we stand a good chance to smash the canoe."

There was nothing else to do, so they hauled the canoe up and made ready for the carry. This was soon accomplished, and the boys had not paddled more than four hundred yards when they came upon a camping party.

With a haloo, they turned the nose of the canoe to the bank, and hauling it up on the shore, struck out for the tents that were a little way from the bank.

They saw that it was a camp de luxe, with fine tents, and even a hammock strung between two trees. After a shout, there emerged from one of the tents a negro as black as the ace of spades.

"Whafo' you wake me up, and what you want?" he demanded.

"We are Rangers and come simply to see that you are not building dangerous fires. Where is the head of this party, and have you a guide?" asked Garry.

"Say, white boy, I reckon I'se built more fiah in the woods than any foah men in Georgia, and there ain't no danger o' fiah where I is. This here's a camping party what is compositioned of

Mr. T. VanRansselaer Graham and his fambly from New Yawk, and I'se been Mr. Graham's man since he was born. Yes, they's a guide what always takes Mr. Graham on huntin' and campin' trips. Everyone's all gone fishing up the riber, but they be back by noon, and it's 'most that now," said the old darky with a glance at the sun.

The boys decided to rest a bit and wait for the return of the party. At about twelve they returned, and looked wonderingly at the two boys.

Garry told Mr. Graham who they were and what their duty was, and Mr. Graham assured them that they were taking every precaution against fire. He then introduced the boys to his party. This consisted of his wife, a grown daughter named Margaret, a handsome girl of about twenty-five years, a little daughter about eight, whose name was Martha, who was always called Patty. There was also a decidedly English young man who was introduced as the Hon. Wallace "Kookoobry." He was a suitor for Margaret's hand, and had come on the camping party only because she was along. "Wal-ly," as he was called by all the members of the family, had decidedly no use for the woods, and preferred his club and the bright light of Broadway to the tent and camp fare and the light of the moon over the Maine forests. The only additional member of the party beside the old darky was the guide,

Silas Peabody, a typical "Down Easter," who rarely spoke.

He seemed to be highly amused at the thought of the boys acting as Rangers, and poked a bit of fun at them in his dry way. Naturally the boys were somewhat put out, but they realized that it was unusual for lads of their age to be doing the work of experienced woodsmen.

At Mr. Graham's invitation they inspected the camp, and found that there were more comforts, and in fact luxuries, than they had dreamed possible. There was even a portable phonograph, and enough tinned meats and vegetables almost to provide an army.

A little later, Peabody told the boys that they had had to hire men and canoes to boat the stuff up the river. "It's mostly on account of the women folks," he said. "When Mr. Graham comes in the fall for hunting, we go out in regular woods fashion. Then, too, that dern dude had to have a lot of this stuff along. The hammock is his idea, and I bet I put it in a dozen places before he was satisfied. I don't care though, Mr. Graham always pays well, and they aren't going to stay much longer, because Wally is getting homesick, and Mrs. Graham thinks that Wally is just about the biggest bumpkin there is. That coon is right funny, and he's a pretty good

cook too, he can even cook on an open camp fire, although they have a patent stove that comes in pieces and was put together when they got here."

Mr. Graham was much interested in the work that the boys did, and was surprised to find that he knew of Garry's father.

"I own a newspaper in New York," he told Garry, "and while I don't know your father personally, I buy tons of his paper every year."

The boys were invited to lunch, and were delighted to accept, not only because it saved them the bother of cooking for themselves, but because they thought it likely that a party that traveled in such style would have a more varied menu than that which they had been living on the past few days. They were not disappointed, for the old darky provided a better meal than they expected to eat for some weeks to come.

During the lunch, Mr. Graham remarked that he thought it was rather a dangerous thing for three boys to be alone in the woods, and in strange territory at that. "I suppose," he said, "that you are absolutely cut off from the world, are you not? What would you do in case of an accident, or supposing one of you got lost. You have no way of communicating with anyone, except to take the long hike back to the nearest town."

Garry then explained to him that it was not really dangerous, that they understood enough woodcraft to take care of themselves if they were lost, and then explained the 'phone system that his father had put into operation on this piece of land.

While Garry was telling him of this, the guide had lounged up, and was listening.

He interrupted to say "Boone is the only timber holder in this part of the country that has had sense enough to do that. You boys are lucky, for I know half a dozen men that wanted to be Rangers in this section, because your father does everything he can to make it convenient for them to do their work properly."

"How long are you chaps going to stay in this forsaken country," inquired "Wally" with a drawl.

"We plan to stay here nearly three months and a half," answered Phil.

"What a bally bit of hard luck," exclaimed the surprised Wally.

"Not a bit of it," retorted Garry warmly. "It's great luck, and we were tickled to death to get the chance. We plan to enjoy every moment of our stay here."

"Can you fancy that!" said the Englishman. "I declare I have been here two weeks, and they insist on staying another week, and I am so fed up with

the bally stillness that I am quite fatigued. Imagine it, not a theatre nor a hotel, and we haven't seen anyone but you since we've been here. Living close to nature is all right in a book, but I must have the attractions of the city like New York, or dear old Lunnon."

"You would get used to it, Mr.——" Garry hesitated over the name.

"Kookoobry," supplied the Englishman. "Here is my card," and he handed one with a flourish to both the boys. Garry and Phil could scarcely restrain their laughter, for the card, instead of reading Kookoobry, read Kirkcudbright.

The boys succeeded, however, in restraining themselves, and after more conversation, set out, having decided to return to the starting place, and then in the morning hike back to the camp, where Garry would take his turn as lookout, and Dick and Phil would make a patrol.

They had two or three minutes of excitement on the return trip, as they shot the rapids. These rapids were really mild, however, else the boys would not have attempted it. Garry took the stern, while Phil paddled bow, and with a steady hand, Garry guided the canoe through the miniature whirlpools, until they emerged in the clear water.

They camped on the river's edge that night, and early the next morning set out for home, as they

called the cabin now. After a steady hike they reached the shack. There was no one there of course, as Dick was up on the hilltop. As Garry started the fire going, it having been banked thoroughly before Dick left, preparatory to getting dinner, he noticed on the rude stone mantel of the fireplace a large piece of birch bark, with a message evidently written with charcoal.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WELCOME VISIT.

THE note read:

"You are good boys. You did not kill my little bear, Hercules. Warning. Beware of Jean Le-Blanc!"

The signature was cryptic. Instead of a name there was a crude drawing of a pine tree, beside which was a figure evidently meant to represent a boulder, on which was drawn a big X.

"Well, if here isn't a real, genuine dyed-in-the-wool mystery," exclaimed Phil. "Who could have written that note. Do you suppose it is some practical joke of Dick's. It would be just like him to do something like that."

"It might be, and there is only one thing to do, that is to trot right up to the hilltop and interview the young man. We will eat, first, though, and then see what he has to say about it."

"If it wasn't Dick, who did this, who could it have been? I am certainly puzzled by it. Still it

must have been a joke as I don't believe that any one in these woods would name a bear Hercules," concluded Phil in a puzzled tone.

"By George," cried Garry. "I begin to believe that Dick had nothing to do with it. In the first place, who does the bear belong to, or rather, who tamed it and put that collar on it. We certainly cannot blame that on Dick, for he couldn't have tamed a bear in a few minutes, and from what Dick tells us of his first meeting with the cub, he was too busily engaged in running to stop and do any miraculous animal training act. Phil, just as sure as we are alive there is something strange about this whole business. Why didn't this person come straight to us if he wanted to give us any warning. And if it was because he didn't want to wait, why didn't he sign a name instead of this strange hieroglyphic?"

"I wonder if there is any hidden message in the signature," asked Phil, as he reached for the piece of birch bark. "I can't seem to make anything more out of it than a lone pine and a boulder or rock with a letter X. According to the algebra books, X is the unknown quantity and believe me, that is what we seem to have here. I wish that we could get a look at him, whoever he is. At any rate he seems inclined to be friendly, and that is something, especially as we seem to have one bad enemy as it is now, though for that matter I am inclined to think

that we have seen the last of our friend the enemy. It is a good thing that we travel in pairs, as that gives us a measure of protection. Then now that Sandy is well, that gives a sort of a guardian to the man who stays behind on lookout."

The boys had finished their dinner and were soon on the way to the "tin can."

Dick saw them coming from the distance and set up a shout as they neared the top. Sandy barked a welcome. The dog was now almost recovered from the blow. Then he let down the ladder so that they could come up to the platform.

"I spent an hour fixing that ladder business this way today," he told the chums. "I am not afraid of anything, but it is better not to be taken by surprise. I have also taken the precaution to have a little extra ammunition stored away up here, and in fact I am able to stand a siege almost. I suppose being alone and thinking over that halfbreed has made me a little nervous," he finished in an apologetic manner.

"Dick," said Garry as he fished in his pocket for the mysterious message, "please tell us point blank if this is a joke on your part, or do you know anything about it at all?"

The fat boy took the note and read it through in silence. Then he lifted his eyes and gazed at his companions in a puzzled sort of a way.

"Honor bright," he answered seriously. "I never saw it before."

Then he was struck by a sudden thought, and looking suspiciously at Garry and Phil inquired:

"Are you fellows sure that you are not putting up a joke on me yourselves?"

"Absolutely not," denied Garry vehemently. "We found that on the mantel over the fireplace when we got back from our tour of duty an hour ago. Phil and I have puzzled over it ever since. To tell you the real truth, while our first suspicion was that you were playing a prank on us, we soon came to the belief that there is some mysterious person around here. Our belief is heightened by that tame bear. It seems strange that there would be anyone living around here who would not drop in and see us. If it is some trapper or hunter or squatter, I would think that as people are so seldom in these parts a little company would be welcome."

Dick made no answer but began to ring on the 'phone that connected him with the deputy. He soon had him, and asked him if there was anyone living on their section that he knew of. He then explained to the deputy that they had seen a tame bear, and wondered about it. After some conversation, he hung up the receiver.

"I thought it best not to tell the deputy about that note, he might think that we were afraid or some-

thing like that. As it is, he is probably still laughing, as he almost choked on the 'phone when I said tame bear. He says he knows that there is neither trapper nor squatter here, as other trappers would know of it, and says if we are scared he will send a relief. After this I think we will keep our little mysteries to ourselves. I don't want that chap to think that just because we are not grey headed we cannot take care of ourselves. Could you find any tracks of any sort?" he concluded.

"To tell the truth we did not think to look," replied Phil, "but the ground about the cabin is pretty hard and unless he wore heavy shoes, there would not be much of a mark. Moccasins or bare feet would leave absolutely no trail there."

While the boys had been talking, coppery colored clouds were gathering in the sky, and it looked as if a severe shower was soon to be upon them. Dick was the first to notice them, and called his chums' attention to them.

"It is going to rain cats and dogs in a few minutes, and there will be no necessity of our being up here. I move that we make one quick dash to the cabin, and save ourselves a wetting," he advised.

Dick took a last survey of the countryside before he made ready to leave. There was not a sign of smoke and all was serene. The boys hustled down the hillside and were just able to make the cabin,

when there was a crash that seemed to rend the heavens, and the storm broke in all its fury. An electrical storm in the big woods is a wonderful sight, and seems more terrific than one in a city. It gets darker in the woods, and the great flashes of lightning seem doubly vivid as they light up the sombre green of the trees. Then, too, the roar of the thunder claps seem to roll back and forth, echoing amid the trees for several seconds.

"I am going out and get that bearskin. I stretched it on the rear wall of the cabin, and don't want it to get wet," announced Dick. He started out of the door, and went around the side of the shack. Just then there was a flash of jagged chain lightning, accompanied almost instantaneously by a terrific thunder clap. Nor was that the only noise. There was a crashing noise different from the thunder clap, that seemed to be almost in the cabin itself. Dick came dashing back, white of face and trembling.

"That big pine back of the shack was just struck, and almost stove in the cabin and nearly killed me. Fortunately, it fell slashwise, just missing us. In fact a few of the boughs glanced off me as the tree fell. Had it fallen the other way, we might all have been killed. And that wasn't all, the bear skin was gone, and here is evidently another of those ghost notes. This thing is getting creepy, and a

few more performances and yours truly is going to clear out of here," muttered Dick.

As a matter of fact, Dick was anything but a faint heart, but he realized more clearly than the other two, just how near to death they had been, and the fatality that they had narrowly escaped somewhat unnerved him.

"Nonsense, Dick," said Garry giving him a hearty clap on the shoulder. "That falling tree just upset you a bit. Let's have a look at the latest message."

Dick handed it over to him, and the three crowded close to the fireplace to read it, for the storm had darkened the cabin. It was on birch bark as was the previous one and said:

"I have taken the skin and will tan it for you. It will be returned to you safely."

The signature was again the tree and cross marked boulder.

"Well, he's a helpful sort of a ghost or gnome, or whatever he is. Wonder if we couldn't hire him as man of all work around the place?" remarked Phil. "Strikes me we ought to leave a little note for him ourselves since he seems to be in the business."

"All I've got to say," interposed Dick wrathfully, "is that if that bearskin doesn't get back pronto I'm going to scour these woods with a fine tooth comb

until I find Mr. Mysterious Stranger, and have a reckoning with him."

Garry and Phil laughed at him, although they knew that he prized his trophy very much.

"Which is it that worries you most, losing the skin, or thinking of having to go back empty-handed to a certain young lady in Colfax?" inquired Garry, giving Phil a poke as he spoke.

"You fellows would oblige me by taking a run around the block," retorted the fat boy, who hated to be teased. "I just don't like the idea of that skin having disappeared. It was such a beauty, and I may not have a chance to get one like it all the rest of the summer."

The thunder had abated almost to nothing, only occasionally did they hear the faint rumble, and there were only a few random flashes of lightning, but the rain continued to come down heavily.

"I wonder if we are in for a siege of rain," remarked Phil. "That would free us of duty for the time, although I cannot say that I am too lazy to want to work. Besides it is our turn to go on patrol tomorrow, Dick, and I want to introduce you to Kookoobry."

"To who?"

"Oh, I forgot, we have not told you yet about the camping party over on the river," replied Phil as he swept into a description of Mr. Graham and his

party. Dick laughed heartily when he was shown Wallace Algernon Kirkcudbright's card, and his English pronunciation of the name.

"By the way, Dick, we haven't had any of that bear meat yet," said Garry. "Did you leave any for us, or did your appetite get the better of you?"

"There's plenty of it left, and its tougher than sole leather, too, but it tastes pretty good. There are some beans left, too, and I vote supper right away."

Supper was merrily disposed of, and the boys decided that a game of checkers would not be a bad idea before they turned in. The rain was still falling steadily, but all was warmth and good cheer within the cabin walls. The boys had been playing for about an hour, the loser resigning his seat to the third player, when suddenly Dick said:

"It's kind of creepy to have an unknown prowling about, knowing all you are doing, and liable to pop in on you at any minute."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when there came a terrific knocking on the cabin door, and a voice called, "Hullo, the cabin."

CHAPTER XV.

NATE EXPAINS THINGS.

THE crashing knock on the door, coming so suddenly on top of Dick's remarks, startled the boys into silence. Garry was the first to speak.

"I'll open the door, but Dick, you and Phil had better get your rifles. It may be someone that is lost in the storm, but there is no sense in not being prepared for anyone. It may be LeBlanc."

The boys hastened to obey, and with their rifles trained on the door, Garry approached and with a quick gesture, flung it wide. In with the wind and rain, came— not the mysterious stranger who wrote the cryptic notes, nor Jean LeBlanc, the treacherous halfbreed, but old Nate Webster, their train acquaintance, who had told them the story of Garry's father and the Moose.

The old guide looked at the boys with a quizzical glance.

"Wall, I swan, I never expected this greeting

from you. Are you fellows just naturally scared in the dark, or were you expecting an army to attack you. You got enough artillery pointed at me, and now that you know I ain't going to harm you, why not drop those guns," he said with a chuckle.

The boys had been so surprised over his advent, that they had forgotten they were not dealing with an enemy. Phil and Dick grinned sheepishly and put their rifles away in the corner.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Webster," explained Garry, "there have been so many strange things going on since we left you at the train that we don't know who or what to expect. That was the reason for our rather peculiar reception of you tonight. But you are all wet, and you must be hungry, so if you will shuck those wet clothes and rest a bit we will get you a hot supper, and then tell you what has happened since we arrived here."

"Well, I am tol'able hungry," admitted the old guide. "What have you, beans an' bacon, flap-jacks and coffee I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, we have all of those things, and if you would like it you can have a piece of bear steak," remarked Garry, as he busied himself with the coffee pot.

"A piece o' what?" ejaculated the old timer.

"Bear steak. Dick here shot a beauty the other

day. A regular old he one, too. You can judge the size of it by the hindquarter which we have here."

The old guide inspected the meat and regarding the boys with new respect, said:

"Well, you are sure some young hunters all right. That sure was one sizeable animal. Where's the pelt, I suppose you got that, too."

"The pelt has disappeared, Mr. Webster," Phil told him. "That's a part of the story that we will tell you when you have had something to eat."

"Now, lookahere. If you fellows want the pleasure of my acquaintance, you stop that Mr. Webster stuff right now, and call me Nate. Callate the only person who calls me Mr. Webster 'round here is the parson, and he forgets himself sometimes."

"All right, that's a go, Nate," chimed the boys.

The old timer made a hearty supper and complimented the boys on their cooking ability.

"Tastes mighty good, and those beans are sure fine. How did you cook 'em, in the fireplace here?"

When told that they had been cooked in a regular bean hole, the old man was delighted.

"Wall, now, you boys are sure getting to be regular old timers," he chuckled. "Get any fish do you? I recollect that there's a mighty fine trout brook near the cabin here."

"I guess we can promise you fish for breakfast," said Garry. "We'll rout Phil out in the morning and have him catch a mess."

"No need of that, I'll show you a trick worth two of that afore we turn in. Guess there's something I can show you after all. Now one more cup of that coffee, and then I suppose you fellows will want to know first how I happened to break in on you out of the storm," and the guide reached out with his cup.

The boys pulled up around the roaring fire, and the old man settled back with his inevitable pipe.

"Wall, in the first place, I'd made up my mind to drop in and pay you a little visit soon's I got a chance after meeting you on the train and findin' out who you were. I wasn't callating to come so soon though, but I got a letter three days ago from 'Moose' Boone, asking me to kinder poke my nose up here on the section and see how you were making out. Seems like Mrs. Boone and Phil's mother here are a bit worried now that you are away from home. Mail service up around these parts ain't what you might call very well developed, and I guess the folks at home are a little lonesome with you away. There ain't anything I wouldn't do for Mr. Boone, so as I wasn't very busy, I just picked up and came here. I figger to stay here over tomor-

row and if you boys would like to write a little note home, I'll see that it is mailed all shipshape and proper soon's I get back to Millinocket. Now supposin' you tell me what all the excitement has been around here," he concluded.

Garry gave him a full account of their doings since they had started out from Millinocket. When they told of the adventure with LeBlanc, the old man nodded his head understandingly. They went on to tell of the threats and what Phil had heard in French, and concluded with an account of the two strange notes and the disappearance of the bear skin.

When they had finished, Nate Webster took up the conversation.

"As far as that pesky halfbreed is concerned, I guess I can tell all about the cause and the effect as you might say. As for the notes, I am jest as puzzled as you."

"This LeBlanc is a mighty tough character, and he's been chucked out of Millinocket two or three times; they've never pinned anything on him though, just suspicion, so every little while he comes back. It was a fool trick on the part of the manager to send Le Blanc with you boys, first because he has a bad name, and second because of his enmity to your father, Garry. Of course, the manager is a

new one, and so he didn't know about that, but old timers remember it."

The trouble started some years ago, when your father wasn't as well off as he is now, and he was bossing his own crew of loggers. LeBlanc was a prime logging man, handy with an axe or a peavy stick, and a dandy when it came to work on a log jam. But he was always a natural born trouble maker, and the camp bully to boot. He started five or six messes when he worked for 'Moose' Boone that winter, and somehow or other the men began to look on him as a sort of a leader. Some of them did because he beat 'em up so, and some just wanted to curry favor.

"Boone took things pretty patient-like, and kept the crew from raising too much Cain, until one night, he happened to come in the bunk house sudden, and found LeBlanc at his pet trick of bullying the cookee, that being the camp cook's assistant. This cookee was only a youngster, and had stood a lot from LeBlanc. Just as your dad opened the door, Garry, he saw LeBlanc give the boy a vicious blow that knocked him up against the bunks and left him pretty badly hurt.

" 'Moose' Boone didn't wait for anything else, he took one jump, and lit on that halfbreed critter like a king pine had fell on him. LeBlanc was so sure

of himself that he stood up to Boone, boss or no boss, and they went at it lickety-larrup. Ain't much to tell, except that pretty soon he was a thoroughly licked breed, and then he was sent about his business. From then on he devoted considerable of his time to making trouble for Boone. Once he ambushed him, and by that time, there was only one thing left for Boone to do and that was to have him jailed. He's had it in for Boone ever since and I guess he thought likely he would take it out of the son's hide. He probably was afraid to do you any real harm, figured maybe that you might get lost in the woods and be without grub or something. Any rate you fellows keep your eyes peeled for him. He has a half dozen hangouts in different parts of the state and wanders around from one to the other. He can't get a job as guide and maybe figured the provisions you had would keep him stocked up while he planned out some kind of mischief against you."

"Now as for those notes," continued Nate, "I don't know what to make of them. There was a crazy old hermit lived here once, but then he picked up his belongings and hiked up in the woods about a hundred miles. He used to get into Millinocket once in a great while with a few skins and get a little mess of supplies, but he ain't been seen there for three years or more. Maybe he came back. That tame bear stunt seems to prove it almost, for

he were a powerful fine hand at taming pets, birds and like. 'T any rate, he ain't likely to do you any harm, and seems to be friendly disposed to you. Wouldn't worry about it. Now I think likely we'd better turn in, only I'll show you how to get fish for your breakfast.

"Seeing as I was pretty wet any way, and my clothes will dry out by morning, I'll go out an do it."

Nate got from the boys four pieces of fish line, to each of which he attached a leader with bait. Then he went out, and followed by the boys, who were so curious as not to mind the rain so long as they might watch the old timer as he set the lines across the water.

"These are what you call night lines, and there's no reason why you shouldn't find a good fish on the hook of each one of them in the morning. It's a trick poachers often use in England. Now we'll get under blankets."

True enough, in the morning, the boys found a good trout on each hook. The rain was still coming down, and they prepared to spend the day in the cabin.

Nate told them hunting stories and played checkers with them, often defeating them, for like most elderly men, he was more or less of a "shark" at it.

During one of the conversations, they told him of the campers, and Silas Peabody the guide.

"Yes, I know Si Peabody well, and callate to drop over and see him, and go down the other side of the Anabas to make a couple of calls. Si and I ain't been very friendly for he figgers I was a little too good for him in a hoss trade last winter, but he ought to be over his peevishness by now."

The rain continued all the rest of the day, but the next morning broke clear and bright, the morning sun making the wet pines sparkle as though they were covered with a multitude of tiny flashing gems.

Since it was Garry's turn to stay as lookout, he took Sandy and climbed the hill. Before he left, Dick and Phil told him their route. They intended to hike to the river, paddle up the limits of the river patrol, strike off along the upper edge of the section, then cut through the woods back to the cabin. This they figured would bring them home on the late afternoon of the third day.

Phil and Dick, accompanied by Nate, set out for the river. They were surprised to find that the old timer was actually setting the pace for them, and when they remarked it, Nate was very pleased.

"After you boys have trudged as many weary miles through the woods as I have, sometimes without a sign of a trail, and only the sun and the bark

of the trees to guide me, a little trot of seven miles won't seem any more than going down to the store from your house," he told them.

They left Nate at the Graham camp, and after a few minutes' chat with the family, and especially little Patty, who seemed to regard the boys as wonderful beings, they departed to paddle about two miles before striking the patrol boundaries.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RAIDED CABIN.

DICK and Phil hiked leisurely along the woods trail, keeping a sharp lookout for anything in the nature of a fire, but finding nothing. In one or two places they found the remains of a temporary camp, but the signs showed that the fire had always been carefully stamped out before the party had left.

"I wonder if we will ever run across our mysterious hermit," queried Phil. "I call him hermit, because that seems to be the only solution of the puzzle."

"Makes mighty little difference to me whether I ever see him or not, as long as I get that skin back," answered Dick. "What's that!" he exclaimed in a startled voice as brush quivered and a whirring sound was heard.

Then there came the sharp report of a rifle, and a few feet from him he saw the body of a pheasant.

"Nothing but a pheasant," laughed Phil. "I was looking for one, there were signs that led me to sus-

pect that I might flush one from this undergrowth, but that one almost got away, it came so suddenly. We can roast him tonight for supper. Makes dandy eating, too, and that ought to interest you, Dick."

"I was so surprised that I wouldn't have been able to shoot him at all. Now, however, I shall keep my eye out for one. Tomorrow or next day we ought to bag a few squirrels, and take them back to the cabin. We've some shortening, so you ought to be able to rig up a nice toothsome squirrel pie for us."

At noon they took a rest, stretched out under the trees, chatting of numerous things that had happened. The hot sun had dried off the trees and the ground, and two or three more days such as this one would make the woods almost as dry as tinder again.

"We have certainly been fortunate, or rather I should say that the landowners have been lucky. So far there have been only two blazes and both of those were small ones," remarked Phil. "Hullo, there's one of the 'phone wires. Let's give Garry a buzz and pass the time of day with him." He shinnied up the tree as he spoke, and attaching the clips to the wire gave the crank a spin or two. There was no response. Another brisk turning of the crank was also in vain. Phil was for a moment worried.

"I wonder if anything's happened to Garry. I don't believe that he would leave the lookout at this time of day." He kept ringing as he spoke. Then he made a discovery. "Say, Dick, this line is dead. It was foolish of me not to notice immediately that I could not hear the buzz the bell on the other would make when I called. Guess we'll have to follow it up and see where the break is. The big storm most likely smashed down some of the trees that the wire was attached to."

The two chums followed the wire for some distance, and then came to a sudden halt.

"Phil, can you smell smoke?" demanded Dick.

His companion sniffed a moment, and then with a cry to Dick to follow ran along following the course of the wire. They had gone only about a hundred yards when they came on the smouldering remains of a campfire that hadn't been stamped out. Already the flames were licking around the pine needles, and had they been ten minutes later the woods would have been almost doomed.

Bidding Dick keep a sharp watch, and have his rifle ready, Phil unsheathed his axe, and soon had cut down a couple of saplings.

"Whoever left this fire hasn't been gone for more than a few minutes. You watch and I'll beat out these flames. Keep close to me."

He started beating at the outer edge of the flames with the green saplings, and after a few minutes' scorching work, succeeded in extinguishing the blaze. The boys made a careful search of the nearby woods, but were unable to find any one prowling about. After their fruitless search, they returned to the scene of the blaze, when another discovery was made.

"There's where your wire is broken," announced Dick, "but it was done by human hands and not by a storm. You see that the trees are all standing, but someone has taken an axe and smashed the glass insulator and cut the wire. Don't touch it or you might get a fatal shock. There's only one thing we can do. As I remember on the map, there is a cross connection between the two branches that run out from the cabin which ought to lie about five miles southwest of us. We will have to trot down there, 'phone Garry to throw the switch in the cabin, and come back here to splice the break. In the meantime we can have Garry report the occurrence to the Deputy Ranger. I am convinced, although I have no proof, that LeBlanc is at the bottom of this."

Phil agreed with him, and after another brief search of the near territory, they hiked at a fast trot in the general direction of the cross connection.

After proceeding for about an hour and a half, they reached the connection, hooked up, and gave Garry a brief report of the fire and the cut line.

"It will be about four thirty when we get back to the break," Dick instructed Garry, "but to make sure, you had better wait until five o'clock and then throw off the switch. It won't take us more than half an hour to make the new connection, but to be on the safe side, don't throw your switch on again until six o'clock, then we will call you. Now check up on time. I have three o'clock, what does your watch give? Just the same. That's O. K. then. While we are going back, you relay our report to the deputy. So long, old top."

Making their way back to the site of the mischief, they discussed the possibility of capturing LeBlanc.

"I tell you Dick," said Phil seriously, "I don't feel very safe with that murderous halfbreed wandering around loose. It is a wonder to me that he didn't take a pot shot at us while we were wandering around after putting out the fire. That fire had only started, and he couldn't have been very far away. By the time we fix that wire it will be almost dark, and we'll have to camp in the woods for the night. We'll keep a campfire going all night, and take turns in watching to guard against surprises."

Dick, however, was of another opinion.

"I don't believe the Indian would dare to kill us," he argued. "It is known in Millinocket that he left with us to carry our supplies, and you know if anything happened to us, Garry would inform the Deputy Ranger and some sort of a search would be made for us. Even if LeBlanc went so far as to bag the whole lot of us, the Ranger would know that something serious had occurred, as he would get no report. Of course, then Mr. Boone would leave nothing undone to bring him, meaning the halfbreed, to justice. Now you can bet that LeBlanc has that all figured out, and for my part I think that he will do nothing more than serious mischief, such as cutting the wire, or leaving a campfire that would be apt to set these forests ablaze."

Phil's apprehensions were thus quieted, and soon they arrived at the break. They had to wait fifteen minutes before the time agreed on for Garry to throw off the switch. This over, Phil, standing on Dick's shoulders, made a neat job of splicing the wire. He was being continually admonished to "make it fast there young fellow, my shoulders hurt."

Three or four times he was obliged to climb down and let Dick take a brief rest. Before making the last climb up on the fat boy's shoulders, he remem-

bered that the glass insulator had been smashed, and as he had none with him, was in a quandary as to what to do. He knew that the wooden plug would be practically of no use, and explained matters to Dick.

The latter thought it over for a moment or two, and then shook his head sadly. "Guess I'll have to do it."

"Do what," inquired Phil wonderingly.

"Eat the rest of that jam right now, instead of saving it for supper," Dick replied as he fished around in his knapsack. Soon he drew forth one of the glass jars of jam that the colored cook of the Boone family had given them just before their departure from home. There were only two or three spoonfuls left. Phil broke into a burst of laughter.

"Go ahead and eat it any time you want to, but why can't you wait until supper?" he asked.

"Phil, I'm surprised at you. I must eat it now. This jar is made of glass. Glass—insulator. Does that convey anything to your mind?"

Light dawned on Phil, here was a perfectly good insulator.

"Dick, old top, I'm sorry I laughed. You have a great head for a young fellow. Eat it up, and I'll finish the job."

"I accept your apology," said Dick with a mouth-

ful of the sweet jam. "Hustle up now, and don't forget to tape down your splicing so that it will be insulated properly. When you want lessons in practical electricity, just come to your Uncle Dudley."

The job was done and the pair went about getting supper. It is needless to say that they kept their rifles handy every minute. Following their meal, they sat and chatted for a couple of hours, and then Phil decided to take the first watch. They decided to stand two hour watches, as a longer watch might cause one of them to doze off, and there was no telling what might happen in an unguarded moment.

Nothing happened for several hours, and then while Dick was on watch about three o'clock in the morning, he fired his rifle off. The crack of the gun echoed through the woods, and Phil bounced to his feet thoroughly awake.

"What's up?" he cried, "are we attacked?"

"Guess not," Dick responded. "Some sort of an animal. I just happened to be looking in the branches of that tree over there, and saw a pair of eyes gleaming at me, and let fly with my rifle. It was a perfect mark, and I guess I plugged him, because he dropped to the ground with a crash.

The boys crept cautiously over to the spot under the tree, and there found a big wildcat, stone dead.

"Some shot, Dick," said Phil admiringly. "I guess that you take all the honors when it comes to dead shots. First the bear, and then this ugly little varmint. I thought when I was awakened by the crack of your gun that LeBlanc was on us. Guess I must have been dreaming of him. Well, you roll in and I'll stand watch till daylight. I've had all the sleep knocked out of me for the rest of this night."

Dick was nothing loath to accept Phil's offer, and was soon sound asleep, and didn't stir till Phil shook him to say that the coffee was started.

"I think the best plan would be to strike straight out for home," suggested Phil after breakfast. "We should reach the cabin early this afternoon, and tomorrow you and Garry can cover the west side of the region. Garry must be tired of the lookout job by this time, and the patrol will be a welcome change. By the way, I have been thinking a lot about the funny signature on the mysterious messages. I half believe that the drawing of the tree and boulder marks the home of that hermit, if it was the hermit Nate told us of. I move that we keep a special watch for a lone pine tree somewhere in this direction. There are of course, dozens of trees that would fill the bill, but precious few would have a marked boulder near them."

About noon time, the boys figured that they were

not more than three or four miles from the cabin, and decided to put off lunch till they reached the shack.

They were right in their calculations, and soon the cabin was sighted. But when they reached it, what a sight met their eyes!

CHAPTER XVII.

PATTY IN DANGER.

THE scant furniture of the cabin had been smashed with an axe, the aluminum dishes had also been battred almost out of shape, and sides of the bunks broken out. Neither had the blankets escaped, as they had been cut to ribbons with a knife. As for supplies, nothing remained. Dick looked out of the side window of the cabin, and found part of their foodstuff scattered on the ground, and then beaten into the earth. Evidently the person who had raided the cabin had packed what supplies he could into a bundle, using, so the boys discovered, one of the blankets for the purpose, and then viciously destroyed the remainder.

In their knapsacks, the pair found enough stuff for a meagre lunch, and some of that would have to be saved for Garry. Dick was for going up to the lookout immediately to tell Garry what had transpired in the cabin below while he had been on watch, but Phil advised that they look about first

for some evidence of the raider, if any could be found. Aside from the little heap of destroyed goods outside of the window, nothing else could be discovered.

At the brook they found that their night lines had also been stolen, and while he searched for possible footprints in the soft ground alongside the little stream, Phil discovered what seemed to be the spoor of a bear. He called it to Dick's attention.

"Evidently there has been a bear in the vicinity, but it is a cinch that no bear ever made that complete job of wreckage in the cabin. It's that half-breed again, you mark my words. Dick, we've got to do something about that, or we won't be able to stay on this job for the summer. First was the attempted theft of our supplies by LeBlanc as we were coming here, then the cutting of the 'phone wire, and the leaving of that campfire so that it would be sure to set the woods on fire, and now this raid on the cabin. We know that the first offense was attempted by LeBlanc, and after hearing what kind of a character he is, and of the grudge against Garry's father, it is fairly certain he is at the bottom of all the rest of the mischief. I hate to confess that I'm beaten, but I don't see what we are going to do. We might search this tract of land for days, and never find him, and perhaps he has

gone to some other part of the woods," declared Phil vehemently.

"Well, I certainly can't give you any advice. It's got my goat good and proper. What may happen is something to worry about in the future. Right now, what interests me is how we are going to eat until we can get more supplies from Millinocket," answered Dick in a doleful tone of voice. "It will take a matter of four days to get to the beginning of the road and return. We won't have to go all the way to the city because we can 'phone and have the stuff sent by buckboard part of the way. But what will we eat for four days?"

Phil laughed until the tears rolled down his face.

"Dick, don't you ever think of anything but eating? Don't worry, we can have some fish, and perhaps we can bag a few squirrels. Then there are blueberries, and you can pick a hatful of those. We won't starve, never fear. The next thing to do is to hustle up the hillside and tell Garry, and then burn the wires to Millinocket with a report and a request for the food that you crave. Let's go!" and as he finished speaking, Phil started up the hill, closely followed by Dick.

Garry received them with a shout and Sandy set up a loud bark of welcome. It took the boys only a few minutes to tell Garry all that had happened while he was on lookout. Their leader's first act

was to get the deputy on the 'phone to report the occurrences of the past two days. Evidently from the nature of Garry's conversation, the Deputy Ranger's remarks were not very pleasing. Finally he hung up the 'phone with a bang and turned to his chums.

"I wish that I was face to face with him for about three minutes. He seems to think that we are stretching things that have happened, and intimated that we were afraid. A good deal of his conversation was to the effect that he knew at the start that it was foolish for 'mere children' as he called us, to be doing this kind of work. Said LeBlanc wasn't as bad as he was painted, and that he wouldn't bother with anything such as had happened here. His last remark was something about recommending to the State Ranger that he be allowed to fill our places and relieve us from duty. Now that is just what we don't want to happen. We came here for a summer's work, and we are going to finish it. If necessary we'll throw up a shack near the "tin can" here, and then the lookout man can keep his eye on it. That would mean of course, that we would have more work, because we would have to tote water quite a ways, as the brook doesn't run uphill. I don't mean to be beaten at this game, and I am sure that you fellows feel the same way about it," declared Garry.

"We're with you right to the end," asserted Phil and Dick almost in unison.

"The next thing to do is to plan for the immediate future. In a few minutes I'll telephone to the store and have them start more food out, and so as to be on the safe side, I'll ask that the man they send stay with it until we reach there, and not take any chances on leaving it cached at the end of the corduroy road. You heard the deputy refuse us permission to cease patrol duty long enough to get new supplies. I don't understand that at all, there is something mighty peculiar about it. He knows that we would starve to death if we didn't do it. I'm one for obeying orders at all times, but this I'm going to take into my own hands. I'll write out a full report to the State Ranger, and give it to the man who brings the supplies, and he can mail it when he gets back to Millinocket," said Garry.

"I have an idea, too," offered Phil. "Suppose you see if there isn't some way that we can reach Nate Webster through the exchange at Millinocket, and let him advise us."

"That's a bright idea, Phil," said Garry warmly as he proceeded to avail himself of the suggestion. He soon had the exchange on the wire, and told the operator it was an emergency matter, and to try and locate Webster as soon as possible. "Of course," said Garry, "Old Nate may not have reached

home yet, but we'll have to take a chance on that."

"While he was speaking, the 'phone rang, and after listening a moment, turned to the chums. "The girl has located him at the Federal Store, and is ringing there now."

In another minute he was talking with Nate Webster. The boys listened as Garry explained matters, and at the end of a long conversation, waited eagerly to hear what the old timer had advised.

"In the first place we're a lot of chumps with pumpkins instead of heads," began Garry, "and in the second place there are a lot of things explained. Nate advises us to trot over to the New York campers, and buy or borrow enough provisions for a few days. We might have thought of that ourselves. Webster says under no condition to stop the patrol duty during dry weather as that would give the Deputy Ranger an excuse to have us relieved. Nate tells us he will give an order at the store for us, and at the first sign of wet weather, they will send us what we need. Then we will be perfectly free to go and get it without breaking any rules."

"Nate's idea of the funny actions of the deputy," continued Garry, "is that he was disappointed that his recommendations for the patrolman and lookout on this section were unheeded because of Dad's owning this land, and sending us here. Nate says that Anderson, that's the deputy's name, is no-account,

and that he only got the job through a little political pull. He wanted his son and his brother-in-law to have these jobs, and is just trying to drive us out, in the hopes that he can send his relatives here. Old Nate declares he is going to put a spoke in the deputy's wheel, though. He asserts that there is a good deal of dissatisfaction among the timber owners in this region, because Anderson is not competent for the job, and Nate is going to travel down to 'Gusty' and have a talk with the Chief Ranger. They went to school together, and are very good friends.

"Also, LeBlanc's horse came back to Millinocket a day or two ago, half starved. Evidently the halfbreed turned him loose. Nate is of the opinion that LeBlanc stole the horse somewhere in the beginning. Webster is going to have the police marshal of Millinocket send out a description of LeBlanc to all the nearby localities, and also make Anderson notify all Rangers in this district to pick him up if they see him. Many people believe that the depredations committed around Millinocket were the work of the halfbreed, and now that we can make a definite charge against him, they will be very anxious to seize him."

Dusk was on them when the boys finished talking, and it was too late to start for the camping party. They decided to go down to the cabin, and

repair what damage they could. All they could look forward to in the way of supper was some roasted fish, and water from the brook.

"We'll have to sleep without blankets tonight, but we can cut a little balsam and make out with that. It will soon be dark, so we must hurry," remarked Phil.

The boys hastened their pace and soon were at the cabin. Here another surprise awaited them. On the wreck of the wooden table, they found a small quantity of flour, coffee and salt. Accompanying them was another of the mysterious birch bark notes. It was even more puzzling than the previous messages had been, for it contained only the words:

"Beware of the Bear who walks on two feet."

The usual drawn signature was attached.

"Well, if this doesn't beat the Old Scratch," muttered Dick. "We seem to be under constant surveillance of old Lone Pine Hermit. I wonder where the deuce he can live. It cannot be a million miles away, because he must have come to pay a surreptitious visit, found the cabin rifled of everything, and yet had time to go back and get this stuff. I'm thankful for the food all right, but I wish he had brought my bear skin at the same time."

The boys laughed at Dick for his constant reference to the lost bear skin.

"Listen, Dick, do you suppose that he could cure that pelt in a couple of hours? It will take him days to do it. For my part, I'll wager anything that your pelt comes back to all safe and sound," said Garry. "As for his living near here, I am not so sure about. Your argument that he must have gone back to his home, whatever or wherever that may be, is not sound. He may be used to wandering for days through the woods, and probably packs eatables while he is on the hike. At any rate, while I am just as puzzled over the matter as you are, for the moment I am content. Through the old boy's kindness we have enough food here for a scanty meal tonight and tomorrow morning, and you will be back from the Graham camp by nightfall if you hustle away from here at dawn tomorrow."

"I wonder what Sandy is growling about," asked Phil, breaking in on Garry's conversation.

The boys ran out of the cabin, and found the dog running around madly with his nose close to the ground. The sense of scent is keen in most dogs, and it was especially so in Sandy. He ran from the place where some of the food had been destroyed, to the spot on the bank of the brook where the bear tracks were, all the time whining for the boys to follow him.

Occasionally a throaty growl was heard from the dog.

"I believe he remembers LeBlanc's scent," declared Garry. "At any rate he's picked up the trail of whoever was here. And look, now he has the trail of the hermit. You can see he is puzzled over the two distinct scents."

"There's one sure thing," commented Phil, "both the raider of the cabin and the hermit must have waded for some distance in the brook, either up stream or down, for the scent ends here, or Sandy would be off after it."

The boys went back to the cabin, and after a hasty meal cleared up as well as possible the mess left by the raider. They remembered that there was a tin box full of nails up in the lookout shack. For what purpose they were left there the boys did not know, perhaps by some previous lookout who had been obliged to repair the shack.

"Those nails will help us a bit, and we will have to make up some chairs and a table out of the wreckage here. That will help some, and we'll get along all right. Blankets are out of the question until it rains again, however. Wonder what the mysterious note writer means by the bear who walks on two feet. His note looks like a Chinese puzzle."

"Wait a minute," cried Phil, "I believe I have the answer to the puzzle. I have just been thinking over in my mind what LeBlanc said that time he threatened revenge, and I recall one sentence al-

most exactly. He said, 'I, Jean LeBlanc, the Bear, never forget.' The Bear, or as it is in French, L'Ours, must be LeBlanc's nickname. I wonder if those bear tracks have anything to do with the puzzle. For some reason that I can't explain, they don't seem entirely natural to me."

"Well, if the mysterious writer meant LeBlanc by 'the bear' who walks on two feet, why didn't he say so," queried Dick.

"You forget that he is probably crazy," answered Garry. "He must be or he wouldn't do the queer things that he has, and he wouldn't keep out of our sight so carefully."

This seemed the only logical explanation to the trio, so they decided to forget all about it for the time being and turn in. Sandy slept in front of the door, and two or three times through the night, Garry, who was the lightest sleeper, was awakened by hearing him prowl around the cabin.

It was barely light when the boys awakened and made ready to start for the Graham camp to replenish their supplies. Phil stayed behind as it was his turn to do lookout duty.

"Keep your eyes open, Phil," admonished Garry. "And I think it would be all right to leave the 'tin can' about noontime long enough to run down here and have a look at things. There's nothing more that they can make away with, but you might sur-

prise the old note writer and make his acquaintance. It won't take you much over three-quarters of an hour."

"Oh, I'll be all right. I'll keep a sharp watch, and Sandy here has a nose that is better than my eyes. There's no danger of anyone surprising me. You chaps hurry back, because I'm going to be mighty hungry by nightfall," answered Phil.

Garry and Dick made for the river, keeping up a steady pace that brought them to the bank in about three hours. They lost no time in pulling the canoe out of its brush hiding place, and then wielding a vigorous paddle started up the stream. Neither of the boys talked a great deal, as the current was a fairly strong one, and they were anxious to make the best time possible. Soon they reached the rapids, and prepared for the carry. "We won't shoot the rapids coming down," said Garry. "I wouldn't mind it if it were not for the food that will be in the canoe. If we got a spill ourselves, it wouldn't matter much, but we don't want to take any chance of losing whatever we may be able to obtain from the Graham's."

They reached the end of the carry, and then decided that they had earned a short rest, and threw themselves on the ground.

"Whew, I am pretty near tuckered out, but twenty minutes or so will make me fit as a fiddle

again. I think I must have lost ten pounds in the last week," said Dick.

They lay looking at the tree tops, when suddenly they heard someone crying in fear.

"Look out there on the river, Dick," cried Garry in wild excitement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RESCUE.

WHAT Dick saw almost froze the blood in his veins. Coming at full tilt down the river was a lone canoe, and in it they could see little Patty, the younger daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Graham. The child was clinging to one of the seats, crying in fear.

It was a wonder that she had come as far as this without the light canoe capsizing. Even now she was in the greatest danger, for the canoe was only a few yards away from the beginning of the rapids. Once the canoe slipped into those miniature whirlpools, without a steady hand and strong paddle to guide, it was doomed.

Ordinarily the boys would not have halted their carry so near the beginning of the rapids, but this morning there was need of haste, and they preferred to put a little more strength in their paddles until they would be out of the swiftest current.

Now not a moment was to be lost. Dick was untying the leather laces of his shoe packs, prepara-

tory to diving in and swimming to the rescue of the little girl.

As he slipped his shoes off, he said to Garry:

"I don't know if I can make it or not before she gets into the rapids, and even if I do, I will have to swim for both my life and hers."

Strong swimmer as he was, he knew that it would be a task almost impossible. However, he did not hesitate a moment, but started for the water's edge. Then Garry had a big idea.

"Wait," he ordered Dick, and rushing to the canoe, where their knapsacks were, returned almost instantly bearing the two lariats. In feverish haste he knotted the two ends together, while Dick, who caught his idea, slipped the noose over his head and arms, so that it rested just beneath his arm pits. This took only a matter of seconds, but the canoe was swiftly nearing the treacherous rapids.

With a "Hope I make it, old top," Dick plunged into the current, and with a long underhand stroke, swam vigorously toward a point where he figured he could intercept the canoe—if he could make it in time.

If he could make it. He knew that he must swim as he had never done before, that he must make the most of every one of the precious few seconds that remained before the canoe would sweep by him and be lost in the rapids within a few feet

of him. He had a double fight, first to get to the path of the canoe on time, and second to breast the current with strokes strong enough to keep him from being drawn into the rapids.

On the bank Garry paid out the lariats fast enough to prevent the rope from holding Dick back. Only a few strokes left, and the canoe was almost on top of him. With sobbing breath, he called:

"Lean over towards me, Patty."

The little girl, who was still crying, felt some reassurance as through her tears she recognized Dick. Then just as the canoe swept by she leaned over, and Dick, grasping her with his last remaining strength, pulled her out of the canoe.

By this time, Garry was in the river, up to his waist, for he had paid out the lariats to the last inch. Seeing that Dick had the child, he quickly knotted his end about his waist, and prepared to haul in the slack.

Dick's troubles were not yet over, however, for the little girl, in her panic, clasped her arms about Dick's neck. The boy was weak from the hard swim, but he managed to break the little one's hold, gasping to her, "you mustn't hold my neck, Patty." Words were useless to the youngster in her fright, so Dick did the only thing left. He grasped her by the hair, holding her out at arm's length, then turned over on his back, keeping himself afloat with

his legs, and trusted to Garry to haul him in. This was what Garry was doing with all his might and main, and soon Dick and his precious cargo were safe on the river bank.

Garry was meantime wrapping little Patty up in his coat. "Just as soon as you get rested a bit, we'll shake a paddle and get to the camp, where this youngster can get into dry clothes and be near a fire," he told Dick.

"It will be some few minutes before I get thoroughly rested after that little swim, but I am all right for now. You take stern and I'll take bow, and we'll get the canoe started, then I can rest a bit while you paddle after we get where the current isn't quite so swift," said he, as he put on his shoe packs. "This is a tough job, pulling these on over wet stockings," he added.

In a short time, they reached the bank near the Graham camp. Here they found all in confusion. Patty's absence had just been discovered a few minutes ago, but no one had thought to see if any of the canoes were missing. They had believed the child had strayed into the woods, and consequently were searching the woods calling for her.

The old colored man was the first to sight the boys. Garry had Patty in his arms.

"Glory to the Lord! Whar you boys find Miss Patty. Camp's sho upset when they couldn't find

her. Land o' Canaan, but youall are sure wet. Now you hustle right up there near the stove, an' I'll call the folks and tell 'em the lost is found, the lamb am come back to the fold."

In a few minutes, his calls to the others were heard, and they came rushing back to the camp. Mrs. Graham kept her presence of mind, and taking her little girl from Garry's arms, rushed to a tent with her, to undress and dry her. In the meantime, Mr. Graham directed the boys to Wally's tent, telling them strip off their wet garments, and wrap up in a dry blanket, while the old cook prepared hot coffee.

"Why this little wetting won't bother us a bit, but the hot coffee will be fine," protested Garry.

"Now just let me run this camp for a while, and get those things off. I want you to be made comfortable, and then I want to find out what all this is about. It is very evident that Patty owes her life to you, and that we are your debtors to an extent that we can never hope to repay."

The boys were beginning to feel uncomfortable in their wet clothes, so they silenced their protests and did as Graham directed.

Just then Wally came back to the camp. He had been out strolling during the excitement and did not know what had transpired during his absence.

"I say, you chaps are all wet. Have you been in

the river, what?" he asked as he saw the condition of the boys. The foolish question made Garry and Dick laugh, and Dick replied:

"No, we just took a little shower, that's all."

"What a peculiar thing to do with your clothes on," he remarked, with the usual British inability to see through American jokes, if Dick's flip answer may be called a joke.

His answer sent the boys into fresh shouts of laughter, and then, Mr. Graham coming up, explained that the boys had saved Patty's life.

"And now, if you feel quite comfortable, I wish that you would tell me exactly what happened," requested Mr. Graham.

"Oh, it was nothing at all, sir," said Dick uncomfortably.

Seeing that Dick proposed to say nothing, and wanting the Grahams to know of his chum's bravery, Garry told them the complete story, making no mention, however, of his own part in it by thinking of the lariats.

On noticing this, Dick chimed in to tell of this part of the rescue, giving Garry all the credit, and claiming that he could never have made the return swim.

"I can see that both of you are entitled to equal share in this very brave act," said Mr. Graham, "and if there is any way in which I can make ade-

quate payment, please let me know. I feel that I must reward you in some manner."

"That, sir," Garry told him respectfully, but firmly, "is something we cannot listen to. We are glad to have been of this service to you, but you must not say anything about a reward."

Seeing that the boys were firm about this, Mr. Graham tactfully forbore to say anything further on the subject, but at the same time he made mental promise to remember the boys in some way for saving his little daughter's life.

Then the chums thought of the errand that brought them to the Graham camp.

"Come to think of it, sir, there is one thing that you can do for us after all," said Dick. "You can let us buy some supplies from you provided you can spare them."

"Buy supplies! You can have anything in the camp, don't think of buying anything. But," he went on in a slightly surprised tone. "If you will forgive my curiosity, how does it happen that you are so soon in need. Did your appetites get the best of you, or what? I should think that you would have provided yourselves with plenty of provisions for sometime, since, as I understand it, you are going to remain here all summer."

This necessitated telling of the raid on the cabin, and seeing that the Graham family was very much

interested, the boys told them the whole story of their adventures from the time they left Millinocket.

The matter of the cut 'phone wire especially interested Mr. Graham, and he inquired in detail about their methods of communication, and applauded Dick's ingenuity in using the glass jam jar for an insulator.

Following the story of their adventures, Mr. Graham had the old daky get a lot of provisions together. He told the boys that he did not intend to stay in camp but one more week, and had more than enough for that time. He also sent the guide, Silas Peabody, to help the boys pack their load from the river bank to the cabin.

Soon they were off down the river, after promising to pay another visit to the camp before the party left to return to New York.

As they came near the scene of little Patty's rescue, Garry asked the guide if they had better make the carry on account of having the provisions in the canoe. The guide told them that he had shot the rapids many a time just to give members of the parties he guided a small thrill, and that they could do it this time. Since it would save some time, they agreed, all being anxious to get to the cabin before night was too far advanced.

Darkness came on when they were still a mile or more from the shack, but since they were so near

home, they pushed on, telling Silas that he could stay with them that night, but that he would have to do without blankets.

At last they reached the cabin, and found Phil eagerly awaiting their coming.

"Any news?" asked Dick.

"Nothing much, except that I found your bear skin here in the shack when I arrived this evening. It has been fixed up pretty decently, too. There wasn't any note this time, however."

"Now for a sleep," said Garry. "I hope that nothing more happens for a few days, as we have had enough excitement lately."

Before they turned in, Silas Peabody recounted to Phil the exploit of his chums in rescuing Patty from the runaway canoe.

More adventure was in store for them in a short time, and a meeting with their halfbreed enemy was soon to come to pass.

CHAPTER XIX.

PATTY DISAPPEARS.

SILAS PEABODY left the next morning, and the boys looked forward to a few days of comparative quiet. For a time they discussed the advisability of building a new shack up near the lookout on the hill top, but finally gave up the project.

The chums felt that LeBlanc would not pay his respects to them again, as he would have an idea that they would be on the watch after the wrecking of the cabin interior and the theft of the food.

They had repaired to some extent the rude furniture, and thoroughly braced the cupboard that held their provisions.

"I have been thinking over this matter of a return of the prowler that stole our stuff," said Garry to the other two, "and I think it would be a mighty good idea to leave Sandy here for a few days as a watcher. You know if you throw an old cap or some article down in the corner and tell him to watch it, he'll stay there for hours, and I wouldn't

care to be the person that tried any funny business around the cabin with him on guard. Of course it will be a little bit lonesome for the lookout, but that cannot be helped."

This was decided on as the best course to pursue, and although Sandy cast longing looks whenever they left the cabin, he was too well trained a dog to do anything but obey implicitly.

Leaving Dick as lookout, Garry and Phil took a patrol of two days. Instead of going to the river, canoeing up, and then striking across the upper end of the section, they covered the territory west of their headquarters, as this had not been done before.

As they were returning home the second day, both kept a sharp watch for squirrels, as Garry had expressed a desire for a squirrel pie that night. They found plenty of the little chaps, and soon had enough for a fine meal.

About noon they had reached the limit at the southwest corner of the territory, and breaking through into a clearing, they came on a man dressed as they were, and hailed him. They soon found that he was the Ranger in the section adjoining that which they patrolled, and soon they were chatting over their common interests.

Arthur Pratt was the name of their new acquaintance, and he told them he was a college student who had put in three summers as a Ranger.

"You boys are lucky to be able to travel in pairs," he told them. "I have to make my patrols all by my lonesome, and sometimes it is a week before I get back to see the lookout and have a chat with him. That stunt on your land of having the wires strung up so that you can get into communication with your lookout is a fine idea. In case I find any trouble, I have to hike back to my lookout, or hit out for the boundary and run a chance of meeting the patrolman from the other section. Things are pretty good this year, but last year I reported three fires, all on the far western side of this section. Two of them were killed by a providential rain, but the third blazed for a week before they got it under control. They had to backfire to do it at that."

"You are perfectly welcome to the use of our 'phone lines if you are in this section and want to get in touch with the deputy," offered Garry. "There is a line about six miles northeast of this point."

"Well, unless you have a string of pay stations along the line, your offer doesn't do me much good, much as I thank you. Just what would I talk through once I found the line?" he inquired.

"By George I never thought of that," exclaimed Garry. "But I tell you what we can do. We have three sets of carrying 'phones, and as there are only two of us on patrol at one time, you can borrow one

of ours. You might not have to use it at any time, but at least when you get a bit lonesome you could take a run over to the line and chat a bit with whoever is on lookout at the time."

"That's mighty nice of you, and I'll take you up on it. How do you chaps get along with the deputy? I think he's an awful crab. We had a run-in last year because I was sick in the woods for three days, had a touch of fever, got it in Cuba when I was there on a visit, and it comes back on me once in a while. Result was I didn't get to the lookout to report my patrol for quite a few days, and he accused me of laying down on the job. He tried to keep me off this job this year, but couldn't get away with it, and as I'm still here, he has it in for me," concluded Pratt.

"We aren't any too friendly either," and Garry told of their recent dispute with the deputy. "I'm glad to find someone else who is on the outs with him, for I thought that perhaps we were in the wrong in some way. I understand that there is a move on foot in Millinocket to replace him."

"He ought to be. He isn't on the job. That last fire I told you of could have been handled much more quickly if he hadn't delayed so long in getting his crew together to fight it. Well, I've got to be getting along, as I'm starting in for the lookout cabin this afternoon, and want to make it before

dark if possible. So long, boys, and if there is anything I can do for you, don't hesitate to ask it. I'll be at this point a week from today and if you happen to be patrolling in this section, aim to hit here about noon, and we can have a chat."

The boys bade him goodbye and then started on the return trip to their own headquarters. Arriving at the cabin about five, Phil went to the blueberry patch to get enough for their supper.

"What with a squirrel pie, coffee and blueberries, we'll have a feast that will make Dick sit up and take notice. That boy does love to eat," remarked Phil with a smile.

When Dick came down the hill from duty in the "tin can" he had news for his companions.

"Nate Webster gave me a ring this afternoon, and says that tomorrow morning we should start for the beginning of the corduroy road, where a new stock of supplies will be awaiting us, including new blankets. I reminded him that we couldn't start until it rained, according to his own advice, and he said that it was going to rain tomorrow. Says there is a queer old duck in Millinocket that has a big reputation as a weather prophet, and he says it is going to start in and rain great guns for a week. I don't believe it, for the sky has been cloudless all day. I told Nate that we would start if it looked like rain tomorrow, but on no other condition. He seems

to have a lot of faith in his weather prophet however, and is certain the rain is due."

"I have a bit of an idea that he is right," said Phil. "There is a breeze springing up, and the sun was mighty yellow as it set tonight. All we can do, anyway, is to wait and see what the morning brings."

Morning found a steady drizzle falling, bearing out the truth of the weather prophet. One thing puzzled the boys, and that was sleeping out for the night with no blankets.

"I have it," said Dick. "You know the sides of the lookout are open and there are canvas curtains, regular tarpaulins, and practically waterproof. If you take a couple of those along, you can sleep as snug as if you were here in the bunks."

Garry and Phil were to make the trip, leaving Dick and Sandy to "keep house" at the cabin. They made good time on the trip, trudging steadily all day long, and building a roaring fire at night to get warm and, in a measure, dry. Fortunately, the rain ceased in the late afternoon, but when they awoke in the morning, it had started again. They reached the beginning of the road on the afternoon of the second day, and found the buckboard in charge of a young chap had been waiting there for about an hour.

"Some ruction down in Millinocket," he told

them. "The Deputy Ranger has been removed and old Nate Webster has been put in his place for the time being and maybe permanent. Anderson is sore as a boiled owl, and claims you fellows were back of it, because Mr. Boone is the father of one of you, and that you had the change made through using his influence. I happen to know different because the manager of the mill went to 'Gusty' and put the case up to the State Ranger and recommended Nate for the place, but Anderson is making a lot of talk about getting even. Nothing but talk, though, he's an awful windjammer. Well, I must be hitting it up and get out of here. First house on the way back is my cousin's, and I aim to put up there for the night. Good luck to you. Giddap, Pete."

The return home was without incident. Nate with exceeding thoughtfulness had sent along a pair of ponchos with a note to the effect that he had borrowed them from a couple of ex-service men who were friends of his. This made the trip home a fairly dry one for Garry and Phil.

"Home" was finally reached, and never had it looked so good to the boys, with its cheery fire, and a hot meal. They were playing a game of checkers before turning in, when they heard a distant hullo.

"Wonder who that can be," asked Dick. "Must be some one with friendly intent, or we wouldn't get

a warning of his approach." They opened the door and waited, and soon a stranger appeared.

"My name's White," he said. "I'm guding a couple of chaps from Portland who want to spend a week or two in the woods, and we caught up with the Graham camp this noon. Found everyone in a fearful fit there. Old man Graham's little gal has been lost since morning; went out to play in the woods near the camp, and hain't been seen since. Mrs. Graham's mighty nigh distracted, and Graham, he sent me over to get you boys. Ain't no chance to get help anywhere for some time, and he wants you to come and help scour the woods."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SEARCH FOR PATTY.

"LITTLE PATTY lost?" ejaculated Garry in surprise. "She didn't climb into a canoe again, and go down river the way she did a few days ago, did she?"

"No, leastwise the family says not. All the canoes are there, and the last seen of the kid was by that British dude. He saw her go into the woods in back of the tents; instead of calling her back, he says he told her to be careful. 'Bout an hour later it dawned on him she hadn't come back, and he set up a holler. They've been beating the woods all day, and haven't found any trace. I imagine you fellows are too tired to start out tonight, but we better make out to get going before daylight, to help in the search."

They all turned in, and were awakened by the guide while it was yet dark. It was still raining, so the three set out together, taking Sandy with

them, and leaving the cabin to take care of itself. On the advice of Garry, the boys packed enough "chow" in their knapsacks to last three days, as there was no telling how long they might be in the woods.

They plodded through the darkness, following White, who seemed sure of his way. Their confidence was rewarded when they reached the river just as dawn was breaking.

In due time they arrived at the camp, and found sorrow and dismay there. Mrs. Graham was prostrated, and Margaret was caring for her. Graham, Wally, Peabody and the two Portland men were fagged out. They had been beating through the woods all the day preceding, and most of that night with pine torches, but had met with no success.

Graham greeted the boys sadly. "I'm still hoping, but fear that she may have wandered around in a circle and come to the river and fallen in. We haven't found a trace of her in the woods, not a scrap of anything that she might have dropped or had torn off by the branches."

"We'll start right out now," said Garry cheerily. "White is fairly well rested and so are we, and we can take up the search. The rest of you had better get a few hours sleep, and then you can relieve us."

Sleep was out of the question for Mr. Graham, he was too worried, but he realized the wisdom of trying to get some rest.

"When we find her, we'll fire four shots close together to let you know. Don't pay any attention to single shots, because as we will have to separate, and will merely be signalling each other."

Left alone, White and the boys conferred. On the old guide's advice, each struck out in a different direction like the ribs of a fan, shouting as they went. They agreed that at the end of a mile, they could cut in from their trail and join, starting from thence in a new direction.

Three times they did this, and reported no success at each meeting. Finally White ventured the opinion that there was no hope. "Seems as if we've covered as much ground as the little gal could have. A little tot like her couldn't go very many miles, and she'd be sure to travel in a circle, all people do when they're lost in the woods. Either she's at home right now, all safe and sound, or else she's in the river. We better get back to the camp and see if she's there. Then we can start out again and cover the banks of the river, both up and downstream for two or three miles. We'll go back the same way we came, that is branching out every little while, in that way we cover pretty nearly all the ground."

The boys agreed that White's advice was sound, and followed it. They were met at the camp by the Grahams, whose spirits sank when they saw no

sign of the little girl. They had been hoping against hope.

After a hasty meal, the guide and Dick struck off down the river bank, while Phil and Garry made their way upstream. Sandy was with them, but was of little value, as the rain obliterated anything in the way of a track, and even a trained blood-hound would have been unable to pick up a scent.

Finally Phil demurred at carrying his knapsack any longer.

"We'll be coming back over this same ground in a little while, so I'm going to hang it on this tree and pick it up as we return. It is getting heavy," he told Garry. Garry was of the same idea, and acted accordingly.

Pursuing their fruitless search, they covered about three miles, and then turned back. "I hate to go back with no news," said Garry sadly, "but I am almost of the opinion that the youngster will never be found alive. This is the second day, and between hunger and exposure, I'm afraid Patty could not live long in these woods."

They reached the point where they had left their knapsacks. Then came a new surprise, for there on Garry's knapsack was one of the eternal birch bark notes. As usual the note was written in charcoal, or rather crudely lettered:

"The Bear who walks on two feet has the child. Twin trees and the North Star."

"That old chap, if he is old, is as crazy as a loon. If he knows so much about this business, why didn't he rescue the child himself, or at least go to the Graham camp and tell them about it, and what does he mean by twin trees and the North Star, and why doesn't he tell where the Bear is, and—"

"Hold on, you're getting out of your depth," said Garry. "Let's go at this thing sensibly. In the first place it is evident that your first words explain the entire matter. Whoever has been writing these notes to us is, as you said, undoubtedly crazy, or at least decidedly queer. It seems certain by the Bear, he means LeBlanc, you know that is the nickname he seems to be known by. Just what he means by twin trees and the North Star I don't know. Evidently we have to figure it out. I am almost tempted to forget the whole matter, but he seems to have tipped us off before and his predictions came true. As for LeBlanc's taking the child, that is extremely possible. He may have been snooping around in the woods in back of the Graham camp, looking for a chance to commit some theft there, and seeing the child alone, kidnapped her for the possible ransom. He would know that the campers were probably well off, and would give anything for the safe return of the child. Our best course now is to get back to

the camp with all possible speed and tell them there what we have found, and then get some advice from Peabody and White."

This was done, and in a short time they tore into the camp. White and Dick had preceded them by only a few minutes. Garry called Mr. Graham and the two guides into consultation and read them the note. When he had finished, and explained his belief that it was a case of kidnapping for ransom, and the child was not lost, Peabody slapped his leg and declared:

"I think the boys have the right idea about this. That lowdown halfbreed would do anything like that. It seems to be the only possibility left. It's almost certain that the child is not in the woods anywhere around here, and unless she fell in the river and got drowned, LeBlanc must have taken her. That note is queer, and the only reason I'm paying any attention to it at all is because Nate Webster told me something about your getting the other ones. He seems to think it is a loony old hermit that used to hang around these parts. At any rate, we've tried everything else, and can't do any worse than to try this even if it is a wild goose chase. I remember that LeBlanc has a hideaway that must be thirty miles from here. We can go downstream by canoe for ten or twelve miles, and then strike inland. I only found the place by acci-

dent a couple of years ago, and I think likely he has made for that. We'd better start off down the river right away, getting to where we'll have to strike inland a little after dark, and then early in the morning foot it in to the hideaway."

The feeling that the child had been kidnapped, even depressing as it was, was preferable to thinking that the little one was wandering, starved and exhausted, through the wet, dark forest.

"I am pinning my faith on LeBlanc's having the child," said Mr. Graham. "If it is a matter of ransom, he will at least take care of our little Patty while he gets into communication with us. However, while I am not a vengeful man, I believe that this halfbreed has caused enough trouble and heartache to make him a dangerous man, and the sooner he is jailed, the better it will be for the community. I will give a substantial reward for his seizure."

The guides and the campers made ready to start, when Garry asked Silas:

"What makes you so certain that LeBlanc has started for this hideaway of his? He might have gone in a dozen different directions. Don't you think it would be better to divide the party, some going north, and some to the place where you know LeBlanc has his hideaway?"

"Now listen, young fellow, I've spent my life in these woods, so don't you youngsters try to tell me

what to do. Fust place, LeBlanc doesn't know that anyone suspects the whereabouts of that place of his, and I'm banking that's where he goes. He can leave the child there, and plan to get word to you of his proposition about ransom. What do you say to my reasoning, White?" said Peabody turning to the other guide.

"I callate as how your way of thinking is 'bout the same as mine. So I say let's be going. If you boys want to come along there's nothing stopping you, but this is man's work, because that pesky breed will shoot to kill, once he sees he's in danger of capture," replied White.

"All right," said Garry, a little bit huffed, "you start along and we'll follow you shortly in our canoe."

Peabody and White, accompanied by the two men from Portland, set off down the river.

Garry drew his chums near him, and told them his plan.

"I have been thinking over this note that our mysterious friend has left, and I believe that I have it doped out. He always puts things in a sort of a cryptic or symbolic way, and I interpret it to mean this: by North Star he must mean that we should head north keeping our eyes open for a landmark in the shape of two trees much alike in appearance. They may be standing in some open place that we

can sight from the river, and from there we must look for LeBlanc's trail. As matters now stand, there are four on the way to where LeBlanc has his hideout. That's a big enough force, and we could be of no help. If they are right, all well and good. They can rescue Patty and capture that treacherous guide, and that will be perfectly satisfactory to everyone, ourselves included. But supposing they are wrong, the guides I mean. Their trip will be for nothing, and that much time will have been lost."

"Now, since we can be of no help to them, why don't we take a trip up the river. In that way we can cover two territories. If we fail, why it won't matter. Now what do you fellows think of my idea?" concluded Garry.

His chums immediately agreed to the plan, and calling Mr. Graham, they explained their idea to him. He saw the force of their argument, and agreed that the guides would not need their help. "Shall I come with you?" he asked.

"If you don't mind my suggesting it," said Garry, "I think it would be better for you to stay at the camp, because otherwise, Mrs. Graham and your elder daughter would be left with little protection, and then too, Mrs. Graham will want you with her to comfort her. Of course, the cook will be here, and so will Wally, but I am afraid, if you will pardon me, Wally isn't of much use just in this crisis."

This brought a faint smile to Mr. Graham's face.

"No, Wally is out of his element here. He might know what to do in the city, but just now he is of no use whatever. So you boys start out. I know that you can take care of yourselves, and bring my little girl back to me safely if you find her."

The three chums made short work of their departure and were soon sending their canoe speeding up the river with strong strokes of their paddles. The rain had ceased, and the sun was making feeble efforts to break through the clouds.

"And now for good luck and a sight of the twin pines," cried Garry.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TWIN PINES.

"THERE isn't much use in keeping a watch out along the bank, for although we might run across a landing place, we would have no surety that it is the spot where LeBlanc hauled up his canoe. It seems that the only thing to do is to paddle on until we come to the twin tree landmark," said Garry to the other two.

"How far do you think we ought to go in search of this landmark," inquired Phil.

Garry pondered a moment or two before he answered. Then he replied slowly:

"I don't really know. In the first place we ought to realize that this whole business may turn out to be a wild goose chase. I'm just following a hunch in making this trip at all. That note was such a peculiar thing, and undoubtedly the writer of it is just a bit loony. Yet I have a feeling that we are on the right track after all. As for the distance we ought to go, I am still in doubt. It ought not to

be a great many miles from here, for although our friend the note writer seems to be here, there and everywhere, he can't cover the whole state of Maine in a couple or three days. I am in favor of going at least fifteen miles up the river, and if we don't see anything of this landmark, we can hold another council of war. At that time we may decide to try another five miles or so."

For nearly five hours the boys paddled, keeping always a lookout, but seeing never a sign of the trees. In truth, there were trees all around them, hundreds, but no two of them seemed to be in such . position, or bear any such close resemblance to each other as to make the boys believe that it was the landmark that they were searching for so assiduously.

From time to time, the one who was riding as passenger would take a turn at paddling, so that one of the three was getting a rest and keeping them fresher and stronger.

Finally they turned ashore and took a breathing space. They also ate a cold lunch that they had brought from the camp, not wishing to start a fire that might be a signal to give them away in case the Indian was lurking in the woods along the shore.

"It will be dark in another hour, so I move we paddle on as far as we can until night strikes us,

and then camp on the shore until dawn. We may sight our landmark in that distance, and if we don't we'll decide that the note was only the result of a disordered mind, and head back for camp," decided Garry.

"We certainly haven't seen anything that bears the slightest resemblance to it yet," said Dick disconsolately. "Your hunch may be good, Garry, but nothing has come of it so far."

"Well, of course, I may be dead wrong on the whole matter, but we have come so far now, that a little more paddling won't kill any of us. My only hope is that if we have no success, that Peabody and White were on the right track," answered Garry.

"Do you fellows realize that if we are wrong, and the guides were right that we'll get an awful joshing when we return?" inquired Phil.

"They can josh till doomsday if they find little Patty and catch that halfbreed. He's certainly been more trouble than a cartload of wild animals," remarked Dick.

"If I remember rightly, and my memory is pretty good," declared Garry with a laugh, "a certain heavyweight chap by the name of Wallace wanted the summer to be full of adventure. I should say that we're getting a full share now."

While the boys had been talking, they had em-

barked again, and paddled steadily in search of the twin pines.

They had been going about three-quarters of an hour, and dusk was on them. In a few more minutes the darkness would begin to deepen, and they would be forced to stop. Phil was sitting in the bottom of the canoe petting Sandy, when suddenly he gave a low shout.

"Look! Over on the left bank. The twin pines!"

Phil's words were true. Standing only a few feet back from the edge of the river were two majestic pine trees, silhouetted against the rapidly darkening sky, two trees that bore such a resemblance that one would think a mighty hand had trimmed them to exact measurements. The old hermit's note had been true. Here at least was evidence of it.

The two paddlers guided the canoe straight toward the landmark, and were surprised to find that at this point a small stream found its outlet in the Anabasa River.

"Here is one of our goals anyway," said Garry, as with dexterous paddle he guided the canoe into the wide brook. "There seems to be a little open space there and we can camp there for the night. In the morning as soon as we have light, we'll see what the next step is. I think we have accomplished as much as is possible, and I for one am dog-tired."

"We might say that we are in the heart of the

enemy's country now," said Phil, "and I should say that we ought to establish a sentry system. If we take two hour watches, that will give us four hour stretches of sleep. Then we will be in no danger of a surprise. If LeBlanc is in this section, he may have the little girl hidden away, and might decide to paddle down stream during the night to leave a communication at the Graham camp about the ransom. For that reason too, I don't think we ought to build a fire. We have plenty of canned Willy and some soda biscuits, and there is good fresh water in the stream here. After our search is over, we can make it up by having a regular hot meal."

Phil's suggestion was adopted and after a hasty meal, Garry and Dick rolled up in their blankets and were soon sound asleep. Phil sat with his back against a tree, keeping his ears open for the snapping of a twig or the dip of a paddle in the water. For a while Sandy sat near him, now and then nuzzling Phil's hand, but after a while, the dog too, went to sleep.

The watcher shook himself from time to time to prevent himself from dozing off. It was weary watching. Now and then he heard the splash of some fish as it jumped in the water, and a tree toad near him kept up a ceaseless noise. Aside from the tree toad, no other sound was to be heard, and

finally it too became still, and then dead silence. Phil could almost feel it, and when finally the two long hours dragged by, he gave a prodigious sigh of relief as he reached over to wake Dick to stand the second watch.

Dawn finally came, and all the boys agreed that it was one of the longest nights they had ever experienced. With the light they took stock of their surroundings. They found that the brook ran between the two great pines, which stood one on either bank.

"Look like a pair of giant sentinels, don't they?" commented Garry.

Breakfast was eaten, the boys being forced again to do without hot coffee. Following the cold meal, Phil began to peer around on the ground near the bank of the big brook. Suddenly he gave a low shout.

"Come here, you chaps. Just as sure as I'm alive, there has been a canoe dragged up on this bank. That's a keel mark there in that little patch of mud, but everything else looks as though it had been brushed over a little with a pine bough to destroy the tracks. If I'm not mistaken, we'll find a canoe hidden in the brush not very far from here."

After a few minutes search the canoe was found, cleverly hidden under some dead branches. The chums were highly elated over the find.

"We're on the right track, sure enough," cried Dick. "Now what are we going to do about setting out after the kidnapper?"

"Let's see what Sandy can do in the way of picking up his trail," offered Garry. He called to the dog, and made him sniff at the handle of the paddle that lay in the bottom. "Now, go and find him," ordered Garry.

Sandy ran around in small circles with his nose to the ground. Then with a low growl he loped off into the forest, the boys following him. For about half a mile they went, following the dog with difficulty. Then Sandy stopped and began sniffing around the ground.

"I'm afraid he's lost the trail," said Phil. "But we must be on the track of LeBlanc. Go on, find him, Sandy," he urged as the dog circled around. Suddenly Sandy gave a short yelp and started off again, his nose close to the ground.

"He's got it again," shouted Garry. "Let's go."

Sandy had dashed madly ahead of them, giving vent now and then to short barks. In this way the boys were able to follow him. After a few hundred feet of this, they came upon Sandy, sitting under a tree and barking. Holding their rifles ready to shoot the boys looked up into the branches. Then they looked at one another and began to laugh and laugh.

Sandy had treed a racoon!

"Well, of all the fool dogs," broke out Dick. "Leading us a merry chase, and then finding a worthless, good-for-nothing 'coon."

Garry, still laughing, said:

"You must remember that Sandy is not a blood-hound. He thought he was doing the proper thing when he lost the first trail and picked up a second one to replace it. Of course, we've lost this much time, but that cannot be helped. The only thing left to do is to go back to where Sandy lost the trail. I firmly believe that he was on LeBlanc's track when he left the canoe."

The trio returned to the scene of Sandy's false start and there took council as to what should be the next step.

"My idea is to split up and each start in a different direction," said Garry. "Of course, that means that there will be an element of danger in it, but it seems to be the only thing to do. Each one of us has a gun, and we can go very carefully and guard against being taken by surprise. If we strike out in three directions we can cover a good bit of ground. Blaze a trail as you go along, or leave the regular trail mark, you know what that is, a small stone placed on a larger one. About every half mile, take two or three short hikes off your main line of march, and keep your eyes open for

tracks or signs of any description that would show the Indian to have been in the vicinity. Keep this up for about five miles, and then head back for the twin pines and wait there. Now each fellow is on his own, and if one of us finds LeBlanc, he must use his own good judgment. Dick, you'd better take Sandy along with you. Don't trust him too far if he picks up a scent, you may find he has a fox holed up or another 'coon treed. Let's go."

The chums parted, and took up the hunt. For a while let us follow Garry in his quest. Boone thought the matter over for a moment, and then decided to head for the brook and follow that for a while, occasionally branching off for short searches. He had gone about three miles, when he came upon the first real, sure clue of the search. It was a bright red hair ribbon that he distinctly remembered having seen Patty wear one day when he was at the Graham camp.

Garry debated whether or not he should return to the rendezvous and get the others to aid, or whether to push on ahead and take a chance. He felt that he must be near the hideaway of the halfbreed, and knowing time was precious, decided to work alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

GARRY IS CAPTURED.

GARRY stopped to consider just what trail he should follow. Since the hair ribbon was found in such close proximity to the brook, he figured that LeBlanc must have been following the little stream from the point where the canoe had been hidden in the underbrush.

"I wish I had had sense enough to think of that a little while ago, then we all could have followed the brook together, and had that much more strength," thought Garry. However, it was too late to regret what might have been done, and since he had decided to go it alone, there was nothing left to do, but push on.

Of course, Garry might have gone back to the rendezvous, and awaited the coming of his companions, but he feared that LeBlanc might be making only a short stop somewhere along the brook, preparatory to pushing on to one of his numerous hide-outs.

As he walked he occasionally blazed a tree, thinking that his chums might return to their agreed meeting place, and then not finding him, wait for a time and decide to follow his trail.

He was pushing ahead blindly, not knowing exactly where his search would lead him, but he believed that LeBlanc would have some sort of a shack near the brook, since that would be a water supply.

Garry swept the ground with his eyes, seeking a track of some sort, but the ground was carpeted with pine needles, which would not register a footprint of any sort.

After a march of nearly two hours, he came to a slight clearing, and stopped to reconnoitre. Ahead of him was a rude shack built of logs, the chinks being stopped up with dirt and moss. A crude stone chimney ran up the side of the shack, and from this emerged a thin wisp of smoke.

"This must be one of LeBlanc's hangouts," thought Garry as he retreated into the cover of the trees surrounding the clearing.

Garry took stock of the situation. From where he stood he could see two sides of the shack. In the front was a door, tightly closed, but there was no window on either side. He scouted carefully around, dodging from tree to tree, until he could get a look at the other two sides. These, too, were un-

pierced by any window. LeBlanc had evidently built the shack with the idea of guarding against any surprises.

Garry wanted to get a look inside the cabin, but the lack of windows effectually stopped any such proceeding. He wished that it was dark, as that would have given him a chance to plan some ruse whereby he could have drawn LeBlanc outside, provided of course, that the halfbreed really was in the cabin. He edged around until he got into a position that commanded a view of the door. The boy estimated how long it would be before he might count on help from his companions, but after a minute's reckoning, found it might be several hours before they could join him. Phil and Dick would be some time making their own search, then they would have to return to the rendezvous, and there in all probability they would wait a while for their leader's return.

He lay flat on the ground, his rifle trained on the door, waiting for some signs of life about the cabin. For an hour nothing stirred and Garry made up his mind to creep to the cabin, and see if he could not dig a chink between the logs, and get a view of the interior of the shack. Dodging through the trees, he got back to the rear of the cabin, and then, holding his rifle in readiness, crept cautiously along the ground until he was close to the cabin wall.

Here he drew his heavy scout knife from his pocket; he opened it and picking a spot between two logs, began to dig a small chink in the moss. This took only a short time, and soon he had a view of the inside of the cabin.

On a rude pallet in the far corner, he could see Patty, tied hand and foot. The youngster was evidently asleep, as she did not stir. Of LeBlanc, there was no sign. For a moment Garry's heart sank, thinking that the child was dead, and that LeBlanc had fled. Garry recollected, however, that if this were the case, the halfbreed would not have left the child's body where it could be found, as the fact that it was his shack might be known to some guide or Ranger.

LeBlanc, Garry thought, might be out hunting for food, or he might even be on his way to the Graham camp. There was but one thing to do, and that was to rescue Patty and make a quick dash for the canoe. Here the boys would be waiting for him, or perhaps coming to meet him, following the trail that he had left.

Then Garry did a thoughtless thing. He ran around the cabin and approached the door. He didn't pause to look around him, a circumstance that led to his undoing. As he neared the door, the ground gave way under him and he pitched into a

hole, striking his head on a rock when he reached the bottom of the pit.

Garry had fallen into a clever trap such as is often used to catch bears.

Let us now see how Dick and Phil fared in their search. Dick had struck into the woods almost at right angles from the course pursued by Garry, stopping frequently to mark the trail he covered his first half mile. From this point he made several short trips spreading fan-wise from his original trail mark. None of these bore fruit, and he returned and struck out for another half mile, following the same plan, but each time in vain. He covered about four miles, and then grew discouraged. There was never a sign of a trail. Virgin forest was all about him, and there seemed to be no sign that any human being had passed that way in years.

He wondered that there were no blazed trails made by some Ranger, for it was seemingly impossible that this section should not be patrolled. Dick decided that he must be off the beaten path covered by the Ranger in that part of the forest.

Finally he thought of climbing one of the tall pines and viewing the neighboring forest, to search for signs of smoke, or perhaps to see in the distance the lookout shack for that region, al-

though he was not very hopeful of getting sight of a lookout cabin, as he knew that this region was a fairly extensive one, much larger than the tract that he and his chums were Rangers in charge of. As a matter of fact, the Boone tract was one of the smallest of the Ranger sections. Still there was a chance that he might see something, so he prepared to climb. Picking out one of the tallest trees in the vicinity, he found it too big to shinny up, and the lowest branches were out of his reach. This was a small matter, however. Unloosing his lariat from his knapsack, where he habitually carried it, he threw the end of it over a heavy bough, catching the end as it came down. Drawing it down, he had a perfectly safe way of getting to the bough. Pulling himself up hand over hand, he reached the bough. It was no small task for the fat boy. Phil, he thought, would have swarmed up the rope with half the trouble.

Coiling the rope again, he rested for a moment on the bough, and then climbed from branch to branch until he was almost at the top of the tree. From his vantage point he scanned the surrounding country. In the distance, he could see the twin pines that guarded the entrance of the brook into the river. Nothing else was visible except an endless carpet of tree tops, stretching away into the distance. There was no sign of any smoke, and not

having glasses he was unable to make out whether there was a lookout cabin on a hilltop that lay, he figured, about ten miles away. Disappointed, he climbed down to the lowest bough. It was only about twelve feet from the ground, and he thought it unnecessary to uncoil his lariat and slide down to the ground on the rope. This, it turned out, was a mistake. He dropped the lariat to the ground, and then swinging off and hanging by his hands for a moment, dropped. As he hit the ground, his ankle twisted under him, and he felt a sharp twinge of pain.

"Now I've gone and done it. Sprained it just as sure as shooting," he muttered. He got up and tried to stand on the injured foot, but it was no go. The moment he put any weight on it, the pain was too intense to be borne.

Dick sat down and took off his coat and shirt. From the back of the flannel shirt he cut with his knife two strips. Then he took the shoe pack off, and the ankle started to swell as soon as the pressure of the leather was removed. Hastily he bandaged the ankle with the strips of flannel, drawing them as tight as he could. Then he pulled the shoe pack on again, although it was a tight fit. He tried standing again, but even with the bandaging found that walking was so painful as to be almost out of the question.

He cast his eyes around at the brush and trees near him, and saw what he wanted. It was a sapling with a forked branch. Hopping over, the fat youth cut down the sapling, and then trimmed away the top branches, leaving a part of the fork. This made him a rude crutch, and he found that by taking frequent rests, he could get back to the rendezvous by the twin trees. The big Airedale, Sandy, seemed to realize that something was wrong, and kept close by Dick. We will leave him now for a while to discover what Phil had been doing.

Phil's tour netted him nothing more than had Dick's. After a vain quest of almost five miles, he gave up and made his way back to the starting point. He thought that he would be the last one to arrive, as his trip had taken some time, but to his surprise found he was the first to return to the rendezvous.

His first thought was of LeBlanc's canoe, and he made his way hastily to where it had been hidden, and found that it was still there, covered with boughs as the boys had replaced them.

He waited for about two hours, and was on the point of picking up the trail left either by Garry or Dick, when the latter came limping into camp.

"What's the matter. Have you been in a scrap?" demanded Phil when he saw his friend's condition.

"No. Tried to jump out of a tree and sprained

my fool ankle. Good enough for me, I ought to have known better," replied Dick.

They told each other what they had accomplished, or rather, what they had failed to accomplish.

"Garry ought to be here pretty soon, now," said Phil. "We'll give him an hour or so longer, and then pick up his trail and go to meet him. I don't believe he's had any more luck than we have. Just because that note was right, in regard to the twin trees don't mean that LeBlanc is in this part of the country. That crazy old hermit probably was just writing a lot of foolishness."

"Well, all we can do now is wait for Garry to join us, or go and meet him and see what the next step is. Unless he has a good plan, or something definite to report, I think the best thing we can do is head for home. Everything is dry now, and we ought to be back tending to business. Good thing Anderson is no longer deputy, he'd probably have our scalps for this, but with Nate it will be different, for this was really a duty," answered Dick.

To return to Garry whom we left in the pit, unconscious from his fall.

When he came to he was in the cabin, tied hand and foot. Near him, sitting crosslegged on the dirt floor of the shack, was Jean LeBlanc, regarding him malevolantly.

"So the wise fool is awake again," began LeBlanc with a sneer. "Did you think to get the best of Jean LeBlanc? Bah! Men had tried, and failed, what could you, nothing but a boy, do? You thought you were very clever, Hein? And while you watched the cabin, Jean LeBlanc watched you. You lay there with your rifle and I went out by the back, see?"

He went to the back wall of the cabin, and kicked away one of the logs, cleverly fitted so as to escape detection. The opening thus created was large enough to crawl through. Garry realized with sinking heart that he had been properly fooled. LeBlanc replaced the log, and sat down again.

"Your friends, they come bye and bye, maybe?" LeBlanc asked after a pause. This was what Garry devoutly hoped would happen, but he wanted LeBlanc to stay there for a while trusting that his chums would be able to capture the halfbreed and release the both captives. As LeBlanc talked, Garry had been trying to free his hands, but the bonds were too well tied, and he only succeeded in chafing his wrists cruelly.

"Everyone is searching for you in different directions," said Garry truthfully. "I'm playing a lone hand in coming after you."

He did not want LeBlanc to take fright at the

thought that a posse might be after him, and flee the cabin.

"You like to know what happens to you?" inquired LeBlanc. "I tell you. Soon I go to the brook, and find a muskrat in my trap. Then I eat, and the little one eats. You don't. Then bye and bye I take you into the woods and tie you to a tree and leave you there. Maybe I set fire to the woods. Maybe not. Then I have part of my revenge on your father. Him I will get at another time. For the little girl I will get much money, and go back to Canada. What you think of that for a plan, Hein?"

Garry said nothing. He was rapidly forming a plan, and he hoped that the halfbreed would leave the cabin for a few minutes so that he could put it into execution.

Finally the halfbreed inspected the ropes by which Garry was bound. Patty's hands had been untied, but he tied them again. As an afterthought he gagged both of them. Then he got his rifle, and going to the back of the shack kicked out the secret exit. He turned to Garry.

"I come back in a few minutes. If your friends come, they will fall into the trap. It has been fixed again. It is a nice trap," and crawled out, replacing the log from the outside.

Desperately, Garry set to work. He had about one chance in a hundred, but great as the odds were, he determined to try it. Everything depended on LeBlanc's staying away from the cabin for a few minutes. Garry did not know how far the muskrat trap was, but hoped it was a little distance away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

LEBLANC had taken Garry's knife, but even had he left it, there would have been no chance of getting it from his pocket, much less using it with his hands tied behind his back.

Garry's plan was the only thing left. He rolled over and over until he was near the fireplace. There was still a few embers, and he sat up and twisted himself so that his feet were pointed toward the fire. Then he dragged himself closer and with his heels drew out two or three of the live coals.

This had taken time, and there was yet much to be done. The premature return of the halfbreed would set at naught his whole scheme.

He had dragged the coals out on the dirt floor, and then twisted himself around so that he sat with his back to them. Garry's idea was to burn the ropes that bound his hands. Three or four times he tried to bring the rope against the live coal, but only succeeded in burning his hands and wrists.

At last he succeeded and he could smell the charring rope. It was necessary for him to press his wrist against the coal, and the pain was almost unbearable, but he gritted his teeth, determined that he would not draw back until the rope was burned through. It was probably only a short time until this was accomplished, but to Garry the seconds seemed like hours.

Then he felt the rope give, and pulled his wrists apart. The charred rope gave, and he was free. He could hardly suppress a shout of exultation. His first act was to burn the ropes about his ankles. LeBlanc had taken the knife with him. However, burning the ropes about his feet was easy, and the leather shoepacks saved him from burning himself again.

Then he ran and released Patty. The pain of his burned wrists was excruciating, but there was no time to seek any measures for his relief.

Suddenly he heard a scratching, fumbling sound at the log, and he knew it was LeBlanc returning. Garry had been just in time. Moving swiftly but silently, he went to the corner and grabbed his rifle, and then crouching close to the wall, he grasped the rifle by the barrel, club fashion, as he waited for the halfbreed to crawl in through the aperture.

LeBlanc, unaware that the boy had freed himself, was incautious about coming in, and as his head

appeared in sight, Garry brought the rifle butt down with a crash on the skull of the kidnapper. He did not strike hard enough to kill, but merely to stun the treacherous guide effectually.

In this he naturally succeeded. LeBlanc lay motionless and silent. Garry reached down, and catching him by the shoulders, drew the inert body into the cabin. Then he tied LeBlanc securely, using a piece of his lariat. He found his own knife in LeBlanc's pocket, and also took the precaution of searching him. There was nothing else dangerous in the pockets, but a hunting knife in a sheath was hanging to LeBlanc's belt. This Garry removed, attaching it to his own belt.

Little Patty had kept a breathless silence during the time Garry was occupied in foiling the half-breed and now she rushed over to Garry and throwing herself in his arms, began to sob violently. The boy comforted her as best he could, and then she told him she was hungry. This reminded Garry that he himself had eaten nothing for a long time. He crawled out through the opening, and there laying beside LeBlanc's gun was the muskrat he had found in his trap in the brook.

Garry soon had a blazing fire going in the fireplace, and roasted some of the muskrat meat, and made some spider bread. In rummaging around for materials, he recognized some of the provisions

that had been stolen from his cabin. Among them was a bottle of the jam that had been given the boys by the cook before they left home.

This with some hot coffee made a royal feast, and Patty and Garry ate heartily. The pain in Garry's wrists was intense, but the only remedy at hand was to make a paste of flour and water. This soothed the burned wrists to some extent.

While she was eating, Patty recovered her spirits rapidly, and now that there was nothing more to fear, chatted merrily with Garry. She told him that she had been playing in the woods, chasing butterflies, when suddenly LeBlanc had appeared on the scene and seized her, clapping a hand over her mouth to prevent her crying out. He had carried her some distance, and then set her down, pulling out his knife and threatening to "cut her in pieces" if she made a sound. They had gone through the woods, how far, Patty of course could not tell, and then came to the river bank, where a canoe was hidden. Patty remembered the two big trees near the brook. LeBlanc had kept her tied and gagged her while she was in the canoe. He had kept her in the cabin, how long she didn't know, for she had lost track of the time, and the cabin was lighted only by the fire, no daylight coming through the carefully filled cracks between the logs.

"Now everything is all right," Garry told the kid-

die. "The other boys will be here soon and we'll all go home to your mother and father and sister."

Garry wondered that the boys did not appear on the scene, as the agreement had been that they pick up his trail if he did not return to the rendezvous. He threw open the door, and began to fire shots into the air, firing in series of three, with a short wait between each series. But there was no answering response.

Half an hour later he tried it again, and this time was overjoyed to hear rifle shots in the distance. By this time it was dark, and so he continued firing at intervals to guide the boys to the cabin. In a few minutes Phil appeared.

He hailed Garry with a shout, and started for the door.

"Here, don't come near the door, not within a few feet of it," Garry warned him. "There's a regular bear trap there that nearly cost me my life. Go around the back of the cabin and crawl in the hole there. Phil did as he was directed, and soon was in the cabin. His first sight was of LeBlanc, who was still unconscious.

"Great work, old top. Your hunch was sure right, and you bagged the arch enemy. And here's Patty, all safe and sound," and he proceeded to reach for Garry's hand to shake it.

"Here, be careful, those wrists are cooked to a

cinder almost," said Garry. "Now before I tell you all that has happened in the last few hours, tell me, where's Dick. Is he all right? Did he come back to our meeting place?"

"That's where he is now, with Sandy for company," answered the other. "He tried to do some sort of acrobatics in a pine tree and fell and sprained his ankle. I seem to be the only one that is whole and sound."

Garry then told his chum all that happened. As he finished telling, he heard a faint groan, and turning saw that LeBlanc was just coming to. He threatened the boys with all manner of vengeance, but he was securely tied and could do nothing but talk.

"I think that we had better start back as soon as possible. That halfbreed will be able to walk in a few minutes, there's nothing wrong with him except a good sized bump where I hit him. We can follow the brook, so there's no danger of getting lost, and Dick will be thinking we've all disappeared," announced Garry.

This seemed advisable, and so they set out after releasing the halfbreed's feet. Phil was detailed to guard LeBlanc, but he had to be prodded several times with the rifle before he would move. He saw that the boys meant business, however, and went along.

Now and then when Patty would get tired, Garry would carry her for a ways on his back; after a hard march, they came to where Dick was anxiously awaiting them. The moon was at the full, and they embarked. Garry was unable to paddle, so the burden fell on Dick and Phil. Dick's foot hurt him, but did not interfere with his paddling. He took Patty in LeBlanc's canoe, while Garry and Phil tied LeBlanc's feet again, and then to be sure he would play no tricks in the canoe, lashed him to the seats.

Garry sat in the bow seat, with his rifle handy watching LeBlanc, while Phil did the paddling. The current helped them make good time, but it was long after midnight when they sighted the Graham camp. Late as it was, the campers were up, and rushed to the bank when they heard the victorious shouts of the boys.

Little Patty was immediately turned over to her mother. She was sound asleep, having closed her eyes the moment she had laid down in the canoe at the start of the homeward trip down the river.

The two guides and the Portland men had come home a few hours before, of course, having been unsuccessful. They were overjoyed at the success of the boys, but Silas in disgust muttered to White:

"'Bout time for us to quit the woods and go raising potatoes when we let a parcel of boys come

and show us tricks about the woods we were raised in."

Peabody and White took turns standing guard over LeBlanc, and then everyone turned in for a needed sleep, as all were exhausted from continued wakefulness and worry. The story of Patty's rescue was postponed to the next day.

The following morning, everyone slept rather late. Old Eph, the cook, prepared a hot breakfast to which everyone did more than ample justice. Then they all gathered 'round, while Garry, Dick and Phil in turn, told of their adventures in quest of LeBlanc and Patty. When they had concluded, Mr. Graham said:

"It is hard for me to express in just words, how deeply grateful we all are to you boys. All that bothers me is that there is no way in which you boys will allow me to make a tangible offering as a reward for your bravery and ability."

"Please don't think of it, sir," said Garry as the spokesman for his chums. "We feel that we have our reward in having been able to find Patty and bring her back safe to you, and in capturing LeBlanc, who has caused us a lot of trouble, and who is too dangerous to be at large. Besides, we hoped when we came to the woods that we would have adventures, and we sure have had our fill in the past

few days. And now, if you will excuse us, we must get back to our duties."

"Then for the time being, this will be goodbye, as I have decided to break camp today and leave the woods. Mrs. Graham is nervous about staying here any longer and we are going back to New York for a few days, and then spend the rest of the summer at the seashore. But you boys may expect to hear from us again soon," said Mr. Graham.

Goodbyes were said, and the boys made ready to leave. The Portland men volunteered to remain alone for a few days, and let their guide, White, take LeBlanc to Millinocket to be lodged in the jail there.

The boys were soon home, and took up their duties as lookout and patrolmen. For some days, things went along in a humdrum fashion, until early one evening they were surprised by a visit from Peabody and Nate Webster. Each carried a large pack, and Peabody informed the boys they had come for them in his care, and were a present from the Grahams.

When the packages were opened, the boys could not restrain their expressions of delight, for they contained a complete wireless telephone outfit, the best that could be procured in New York. Everything was perfect, including collapsible aluminum standards for the antennae, a receiving station and carrying 'phones.

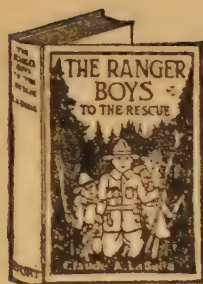
Peabody had told Nate all about the boys' work in rescuing Patty Graham, and Nate complimented them highly.

"I have sent a full report to the State Ranger, as an example of real heroism, worthy of our Rangers," he said. "And now, Peabody and I will stay here over night, and hike back tomorrow."

"Well, now that we are rested up, I am ready for another round of adventures. I wonder if anything will happen, or will we spend the rest of the summer just in carrying out our Ranger work," queried Gary.

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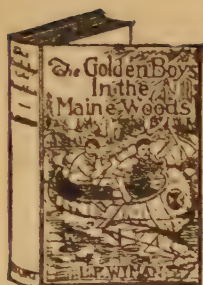
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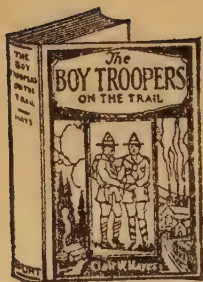
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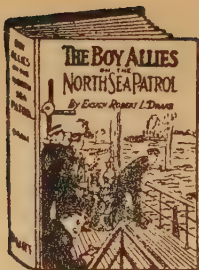
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